BACKSTAGE AT F1'S BIG LAUNCH PARTY

BBC
TopGear
APRIL 2025

STRIPPED 'N' RIPPED

CAN HARDCORE GT2 STRADALE OUTGUN NEW 911 GT3? BEST OF LUCK!

MASERATI

THE COMEBACK?

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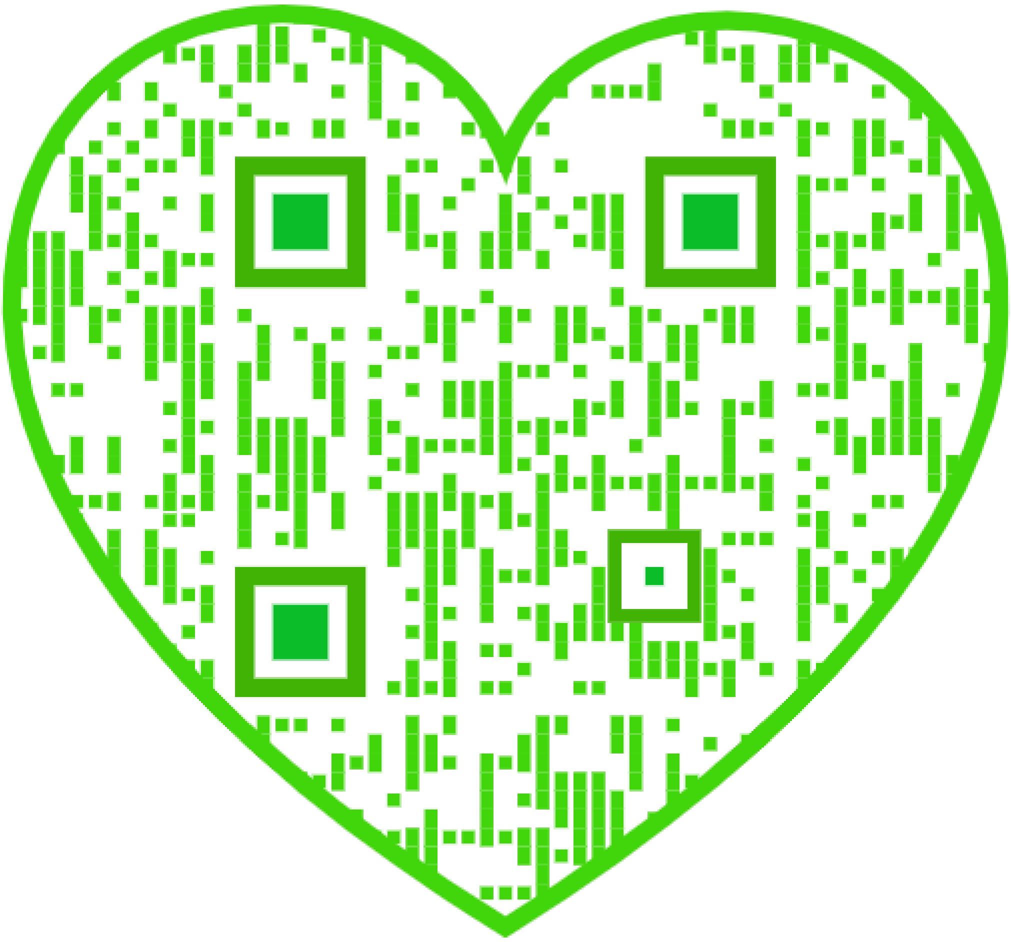

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JACK RIX

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BBC TG
Issue 394

Maserati. A name still capable of sending me spinning into daydreams about punting around the Dolomites in something deliciously curvaceous, snorting exhaust shaking the leaves from the trees. It's a name that emphatically passes the dinner party test – drop in you drive a Ferrari or a Lamborghini and you shall be judged, but a Maser marks you out as roguish with a story to tell.

Don't ask me why, because this is a company that seems to lurch from moments of genius to baffling flops with alarming regularity. From svelte saloons with earsplitting Ferrari derived V8s one minute (the 2009 Quattroporte Sport GTS remains firmly in my dream garage) to diesel Ghiblis the next… consistency has never been Maserati's strong point. An aura of exotica – even when it's trying to flog BMW 520d rivals, or now with its full embrace of electrification – is.

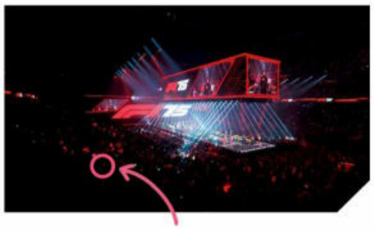
It exists in a small group of brands that everyone adores and romanticises about, but refuses to actually buy when more reputable competition exists. Alfa Romeo, Jaguar, Maserati – a true petrolhead must wax lyrical about them, it's the law, but pick them over a Porsche or BMW? You must be mad.

The key to commercial success these days seems to be companies with sharply defined personalities, which makes sense when we're all bombarded to the point of paralysis by choice. It's why Dacia (affordable, outdoorsy, no nonsense) and Ferrari (extreme performance, pinnacle of technology) do so well. You know where you stand, instantly. With Maserati it's not so clear quite what you're buying into. Rampant Italian horsepower and pinpoint handling, or luxury and comfort?

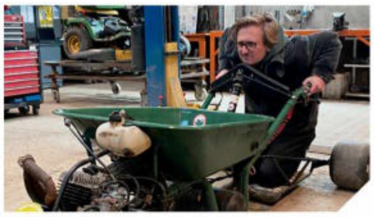
Truth is, Maserati wants to be both, and has the heritage to make it stick, which is why it has the brass to produce two products as diametrically opposed as the new track honed MC20 GT2 Stradale and the electric ultra luxe GranTurismo Folgore. Can this duo simultaneously beat the Porsche 911 GT3 and the Bentley Continental GT at their own games? It's a hell of an ask, but with Maserati you never quite know…

Enjoy the issue,

CONTRIBUTORS



WHO: *SAM PHILIP*
We sent Sam to report from F1's 2025 launch party – as someone who knows nothing about F1, he was the obvious choice



WHO: *HUCK MOUNTAIN*
The man with the world's greatest name, now has 'photographing the world's fastest wheelbarrow' on his CV

WHO: *JETHRO BOVINGDON*
If you can't get two cars in the the same place – send the same man to drive them both. How are those air miles looking Jethro?

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TURN TO PAGE 036

Stainless steal.

AUTOMATIC
SWISS MADE

In 1972, famed designer Gérald Genta created an oxymoron. Priced more than many precious metal rivals, the 'luxury stainless steel timepiece' was not an immediate success. But eventually its tough, elegant body, integrated bracelet and patterned dial caught on. A watch that dressed up for dinner. Or down, at the pool. Today's 40mm, base automatic of that original watch costs £22,850 more than the **'Twelve'** - named for its dodecagon-sided bezel and rear lock ring. Our watch is thinner, goes deeper and offers a choice of C1/BL Grade X1-lumed dials. A polished, brushed and sandblasted case of daylight (and night time) robbery?

Do your research.

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watch

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Explore the edge of innovation here:

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2025 HOT HATCH DEATH MATCH! ONLY ONE WILL SURVIVE...

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MARSIEN INVASION

An invitation to high tea in the middle of the desert. Our carriage? The most outrageous off road version of the 911 ever made

APRIL

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WHEELBARROW WARS

We went to see the world's fastest wheelbarrow. That should get the garden sorted nice and quickly

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PADDY LOWE

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TRENDING

UNSUNG HEROES WITH UNHEALTHY OBSESSIONS
WHEEL NUT

The world's fastest wheelbarrow

It's about time the humble garden barrow had a page in the motorsport history books, thought Dylan Phillips…

WORDS OLLIE KEW
PHOTOS HUCKLEBERRY MOUNTAIN

"Is it like, y'know, riding a bike?" "Um, it's more like pushing a wheelbarrow. Except the wheelbarrow is trying to kill you."

Dylan Phillips is the third land speed record holder I've had the privilege to interview, after road car speed king Andy Wallace and sound barrier smasher Andy Green. But Dylan's different – he built a certifiable straight line speed machine all by himself.

Bolting a 7bhp Honda SJ100 'Bali' scooter engine to an unsuspecting Haemmerlin wheelbarrow in a workshop buried in deepest Pembrokeshire, this softly spoken 38-year-old Welshman created a garden tool capable of tearing down the RAF Elvington runway at a certified 52.58mph average. Pray silence please for the fastest wheelbarrow on Earth.

KEEP UP WITH DYLAN'S PROJECTS BY CHECKING OUT TEGRYN TOYSHOP ON FACEBOOK AND YOUTUBE

Problem with riding your wheelbarrow is that the motorbike makes for a lousy earthmover

Hammerlin
Hammerlin

"I didn't expect this to blow up like it did," Dylan admits. "There are so many things going on in the news, you just don't expect buggering about with a wheelbarrow to get any traction."

So where did the inspiration come from? "I've always had an interest in machinery, things that work, but it's taken a long time to find that little niche," he shrugs. "To almost feel comfortable enough in being uncool to just do this stuff." All *TG* readers will agree this a very long way from uncool…

"Like all the best and worst plans, it started in the pub. I had this idea of strapping a scooter engine onto a wheelbarrow and just sort of having a laugh with it. It hadn't even crossed my mind there were world records for this sort of thing. After I built it, there was another late night pub discussion wondering if there was a Guinness World Record…"

To compete in a certified speed trial, the barrow had to be rebuilt to NORA 92 official standards, with a kill switch, paint marks on fastenings to ensure nothing's working loose and even a hydraulic damper on the steering bars to stave off a terminal tank slapper (barrow basher?).

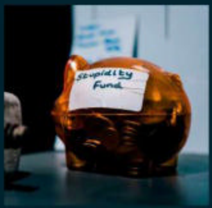
"It still does get a wobble on," grimaces Dylan. "If you built a bike with this frame geometry it would be the worst looking bike in the world. You'd have a front wheel two feet out in front of the forks. So yeah, the steering damper helps a bit, but the issue is slowing down." Not least because there are no brakes fitted to the go kart wheels either side of the scratch built 'trolley' that Dylan kneels in. Only the driven front wheel retains its scooter brake.

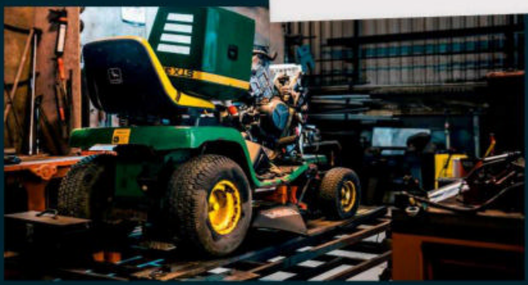
Dylan admits that's the main flaw he needs to troubleshoot for MkII: the brakes. And the steering – semi impossible because he's forced to tuck his elbows in like a ski jumper. Also above 50mph the barrow acts like a wing and tries to take off. Oh, and the weight distribution is a touch sketchy – that barrel slung into the skids isn't the fuel tank – it's an old fire extinguisher full of wet sand to offer stabilising ballast.

The next generation of speed barrow will have its engine hung down there ("mid-engined, y'see") chain driving the front wheel with brakes to all three wheels. Dylan is rightly proud of the fact this isn't some quasi barrow silhouette racer. It's 100 per cent garden centre. "If you pulled the engine off and uncoupled the back you could use it on a building site."

Dylan's homebrew efforts don't stop there. Scattered about his workshop there's a motorbike straight out of *Mad Max* powered by the (vast) engine from a 1952 cement mixer, another build rescuing bits of Chinese bike fished from a riverbed, and 'Project Dear Oh Deere' – a ride on lawnmower fused with the 110bhp V twin off a Honda Firestorm superbike.

Look after the pennies and the lunacy will look after itself





It's all for a good cause – Dylan's monthly workshop open evenings raise money for the DPJ Foundation, a mental health charity working to support the Welsh agricultural sector. And having proved his concept out of his own pocket he's hoping sponsors will support the next build. He's already been supplied with a fresh barrow.

He'll need it – within days of us meeting Dylan, he had word from the USA the benchmark had been raised. An Iowan by the name of John Loghry managed 55mph on his homemade motor barrow, while raising funds for Vietnam veterans.

The Welsh response is expected to kick out a mighty 28bhp and be geared for north of 70mph. The pan-Atlantic charity speed barrow battle has begun.

NEW METAL

Rock and Rolls

The new Spectre Black Badge is the "alter ego" of the Rolls range… and it's flipping quick

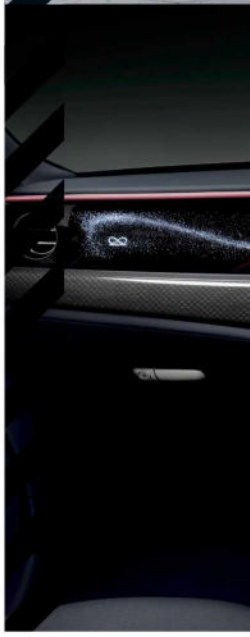
WORDS: VIJAY PATTNI

THIS NEW BLACK BADGE SPECTRE JUST happens to be the most powerful Rolls-Royce ever built. And it's been built specifically for the most thrusting of R-R clients. Owners apparently allowed Rolls' engineers access to hundreds of thousands of miles of their anonymised driving data, leading to this latest electric Spectre with 650bhp and a massive 793lb ft of torque (up from 576bhp/664lb ft in the standard version of the car).

The power comes by clicking the Black Badge Spectre into 'Infinity' mode, while the torque – hilariously dubbed 'Spirited mode' – is (temporarily) accessible by pressing the brake and accelerator, waiting for a signal, and then holding on for dear life. Because this new Spectre can crack through 0–60mph in just 4.1secs. The battery remains the same at 102kWh, rated up to 329 miles of range. And to better deal with this 'spirited' Spectre, engineers have increased the steering weight, adjusted roll stabilisation and tweaked the dampers for better body control.

The Vapour Violet paint here is inspired by the "neon ambience of 1980s and 1990s club culture", a reference that apparently resonates with buyers. The bonnet can be painted Iced Black for contrast, there are 23in five spoke forged aluminium wheels, an illuminated grille and the ability to commission a 'waft' coachline that sits on the lower half of the Spectre's body. Not much 'waft' when there's 650bhp, but even Black Badge owners need a break.

Speaking of which, the interior is especially lavish. There are 5,500 fibre optic 'stars' in the black headliner while you're hurtling to Infinity and beyond, and a special finish of carbon, metal and wood, with a diamond patterned hand laid thread. "Black Badge Spectre is one of the clearest statements of power and purpose we have ever made," says Rolls boss Chris Brownridge. "Our engineers combined data science, qualitative feedback, and their own deep knowledge of the brand's alter ego to craft an intense and uncompromising character, and the most powerful Rolls-Royce in history."



HIT or MISS

Two titans of the editorial team have it out

JACK RIX

TG'S EDITOR IN CHIEF APPROVES OF WHAT ROLLS IS THINKING

You may recall a slightly breathless Ollie Kew calling the Spectre "the best car in the world" when he first drove one back in 2023, and you can see why – this was Rolls-Royce arriving at the place it had been reaching for forever. Perfect silence, bottomless torque, zero vibrations, maximum waft. The whole Black Badge sub-brand was devised to appeal to younger millionaires, so inevitably it's a bit gauche. But you don't have to have one in Quality Street purple, taste and restraint can be applied to the interior too, and if you don't like the sound of launch control in a Rolls, you might want to check your pulse.

"Perfect silence, bottomless torque, zero vibrations"

SAM BURNETT

ROLLS IS IN DANGER OF LOSING ITS IDENTITY RECKONS TG'S SUB-EDITOR

All a bit new money isn't it? The problem is no one cares now whether a 93-year-old artisan has lovingly placed every last lithium cell following the traditions of his forebears, so Rolls can't compete in a whizzy electric age. If you can't beat them, turn into them is the new motto. Alter ego? A Rolls-Royce should just be pure ego. And a sporty mode button on the steering wheel? I ask you. These cars have always been less Jekyll and Hyde, *more* Upstairs, Downstairs. *No, what they should have focused on is a lighter walnut burr and quilted leather combo to give the Spectre enough real world range to get to the bottom of the driveway.*

"An alter ego? A Rolls-Royce should just be pure ego"

Careful, drop your diamond earings in the footwell and you might not find them again

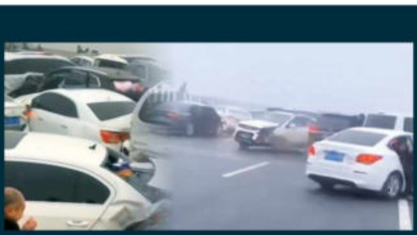
VIRAL

Around the world in seven questionable car stories

1. USA

Driver flips off rival during 24 Hours of Daytona

It all got a little bit heated at the 24 Hours of Daytona, during which Corvette's Tommy Milner gave BMW's Augusto Farfus the middle finger mid race. Milner saw red after after he was blocked by the lapped Farfus, allowing the BMW driver's teammate Connor De Phillippi to close in.



2. China

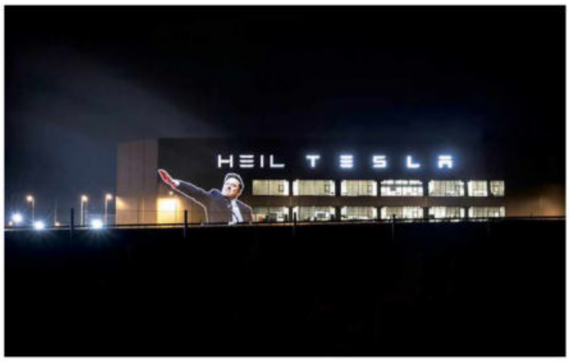
Fog causes 100 car pileup on highway bridge

Thick fog and low visibility caused a horror pileup involving more than 100 vehicles on a highway bridge in Zhengzhou, China. Videos shared online showed bystanders frantically waving and shouting at oncoming traffic in an attempt to get them to slow down. Scary stuff.

3. Germany

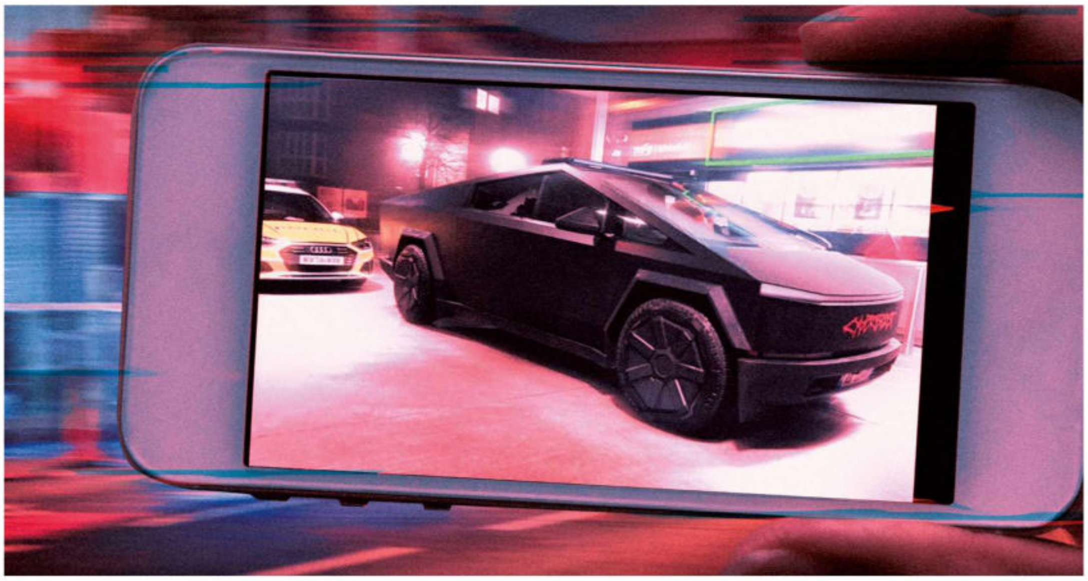
Activists project 'Heil Tesla' onto Tesla gigafactory

An image of Elon Musk, accompanied by the phrase "Heil Tesla", was projected onto Tesla's Berlin gigafactory after the Tesla CEO made a Nazi-like salute during a rally for Donald Trump in Washington DC. Tesla's sales in Germany were also down 59 per cent in January.



4. UK
Police seize imported Tesla Cybertruck ↘

Greater Manchester police have seized a Tesla Cybertruck for not complying with road regulations. Police in Bury stopped the Cybertruck for two infringements, firstly for being registered and insured abroad (as a permanent UK resident the law requires it to be registered and insured in the UK), and secondly for not having a certificate of conformity (a legal document that proves it meets UK safety regulations). Just ask YouTuber Yiannimize how difficult it is to get one of those, whose battle to get his Cybertruck signed off here continues.



5. Lebanon
Technician crashes Lambo Revuelto on delivery day

Spare a thought for the Lebanese Lamborghini buyer whose car was crashed by a technician on the day of delivery while being taken to a nearby petrol station. Images shared on social media show it nose first in a concrete wall, with the front left wheel missing and the driver's door a crumpled mess. Hope they had insurance...

6. USA
Eminem sues dealer for using music

Eminem is sueing a Detroit Ford dealership for using his 'Lose yourself' track in ads promoting a special edition Ford F-150, seeking $150k in damages. Who let the intern loose?

7. Monaco
WRC driver hit with penalty for hairpin drift

Oliver Solberg was given a five-minute time penalty for "exhibition driving" after drifting around the Fairmont hairpin on his way to parc ferme at Rallye Monte-Carlo.

coffee break

What we're watching/ listening/doing, while we should be working

It's a football knockout, 4/5 and 11/12 March
The first year of a revamped Champs' League tournament reaches the round of 16. The best teams in Europe, the crème de la crème, the crème anglaise, the prêt-à-manger...

***Mickey 17*, In cinemas 7 March**
We like the look of this film. If you love R-Patz then you'll get to see him 17 times as his body can be cloned if it dies. If you don't, well, read the line above again

Daylight saving time, 30 March
This. Is. It. The start of the brighter mornings and lighter nights. Who gives a fudge if we lose an hour of sleep?! Only the folk who had forgotten to celebrate Mother's day earlier ON THE SAME DAY!

Japanese Grand Prix, 1 April
Round three of the F1 calendar hits the brilliant Suzuka circuit. You'd be a fool not to expect an unexpected win by the honourable *signor* Hamilton

April Fools' day, 1 April
APRIL FOOL! The Japanese Grand Prix is actually 4–6 April. BOOM! Roasted! Mother's Day is definitely 30 March, no jokes on that one

PLAYLIST

SCAN HERE TO FIND THEM ALL

Procrastination ahoy! Six videos you need to watch now

STILL THE BOSS?

Has the latest 911 GT3 been stifled by new legislation? Is it just a shadow of the car it used to be? We sent Jethro to sit awkwardly on the bonnet, and hopefully to drive it too

ICH BIN EIN BERLINER

We've been to Berlin (where they build them) to drive the new version of the world's bestselling car, aka the Tesla Model Y. Spoiler alert: we don't like the indicators

DUNE BASHING

Thought the 911 Dakar was the ultimate off road Porsche? Marc Philipp Gemballa begs to differ. We send Tom Ford to drive MPG's Marsien in the dunes of Dubai

MONSTER MUSTANG

The GTD is Ford's most hardcore road legal Mustang ever. Evidence? In December last year it posted a Nürburgring lap time of 6:57.6 at an average pace of 110.6mph. We take a closer look

ZINGING IN THE RAIN

The Ferrari 12Cilindri Spider promises all sorts of gloriousness... unfortunately Portugal was wetter than an otter's pocket when we went to drive it. Ollie Kew dives in

STIG LAPS: JAGUAR C-X75

The Jaguar hypercar that never made production, but did appear in a Bond film, has been restored and resurrected... by the man who designed it in the first place. We put it around the *TG* track

COMMENTS

BMW M3 CS TOURING

THE GOOD

I can't help but love this. Even with its horrible face (easily remedied with aftermarket mods) which somehow the wagon body kind of suits. I really am not a fan of the saloon and (especially) coupe. But this? If I had the money and only one car – this would be it I think

deanjackson88

A VERY beautiful spec

Sandile Samuel

I LOVE IT. IT LITERALLY MURDERS SUPERCARS ON TRACK AND THIS IS AN ESTATE

Thijs Ter

Sure, it's still not a looker. But what's not to like about a 550hp, six cylinder super estate?

Pikkle

THE BAD

Fast estates should be stealthy looking not full of stickers, liveries and spoilers

Maciek Mac Szyluk

£120k for an M3. Madness

Scott Clutton

NOSTALGIC FLEECING AGAIN

Simon Smith

Man that thing looks terrible

Alex Passos

Cars are gonna cost more than houses soon

Darren Babey

THE UGLY

CS models look so whack these days, with ridiculous red pinstriping and bodykits, on a station wagon...

Markus Viljanen

Nope, that front end is still gopping

Wanderer

Who can really handle a car like this. It's a weapon and the driver a stupid criminal. With such cars you don't cause accidents, you commit crimes

Levi Düsseldorf

But look at it. £120k plus options for stickered up Halfords special estate

Steve Wallis

120 large... For a BMW... An ugly BMW... A BMW with inferior build quality to any BMW built in the 1980s. Pure comedy!

Pete Clarke

YOU WAIT AGES FOR A BMW M3 WAGON, AND THEN TWO COME along at once. Sort of. This is the new M3 CS Touring – the fastest most powerful version of BMW's coolest new car.

Clearly making hay while the Audi RS4 is having a nice holiday and everyone's forgotten about the Mercedes-AMG C63 estate, BMW has ushered in the Competition Sport version. And like its two and four door siblings, this Competition Sport Touring packs an uprated powertrain. Where that 3.0-litre turbocharged six pot produces 523bhp in the 'not at all regular' Competition, it now makes 542bhp and 479lb ft, allied to an 8spd auto and four wheel drive to allow much acceleration and speed. Indeed, it'll do 186mph flat out, goes from 0–62mph a tenth of a second faster (3.6secs) and will power through 0–124mph in 11.7secs.

Each limited number car starts at £120,600, which is £32,655 more than a 'not at all regular' M3 Touring. Worth it for the most powerful version of BMW's coolest new car? **VIJAY PATTNI**

WATCHES

Winning formula

Watchmakers and motorsport have a long standing relationship. But the guard is changing for 2025 F1

WORDS: RICHARD HOLT

A FEW YEARS BACK, F1 FANS WERE complaining. Smaller, more efficient engines – introduced in 2014 – were not great news for those who remembered when motorsport was so loud it made your organs vibrate.

Now, all negative chat has gone. There is a new billion dollar watch deal, and viewing figures are up as Netflix's *Drive to Survive* has brought a load of new eyeballs to the sport, particularly in America. Next year they are even going to make the engines noisier again.

TAG Heuer also begins its role as F1's title sponsor and replaces Rolex as official timekeeper.

While the TAG deal is new, the brand's background in the sport goes way back. It sponsored Ferrari in the 1970s, followed by long term deals with the Ayrton Senna-era McLaren team, and later with Red Bull Racing.

And TAG Heuer is far from the only watchmaker on the track. Richard Mille sponsors Ferrari – as well as McLaren – so all eyes will be on the wrist of watch loving Lewis Hamilton as he has a tilt at an eighth title. Hamilton's previous watch brand of (contractually bound) choice, IWC, is still a Mercedes sponsor, while Tudor and other watchmakers sponsor individual teams.

Watches and motor racing have gone together from the start. And with watchmakers still more than happy to hand over large quantities of moolah, it appears that the relationship is in rude health.

PRO TIP

Porsche led the way with its online car configurator. Some watch companies are now finally getting in on the act and allowing you a range of clickable choices. Affordable brands like Swatch generally offer more options online, however. Most of the posh ones still require you to step out from behind your screen and go into a physical store, and the watches they sell are decided by them, not the punter.

TAG Heuer Formula One Chronograph

TAG Heuer launched its first F1 line in the mid 1980s, nailing its motorsport colours firmly to the mast. The collection has grown in sophistication over the years, and this new chronograph has a 44mm sandblasted titanium case and an automatic movement with a 42 hour power reserve. Also water resistant to 200m. £4,300; tagheuer.com

BLOW THE BUDGET

Richard Mille RM 67-02

A racing mad Frenchman gave his name to a company that sells watches with an average price north of a £100k. No sooner did Hamilton arrive at Ferrari, he was spotted wearing an ultra lightweight RM 67-02, an automatic watch that weighs just 32g. £POA; richardmille.com

UNDER £5k

Tudor Black Bay

Rolex may have left F1, but sister brand Tudor is still there, sponsoring the Racing Bulls. Drivers will be seen in a blue dialled version of the ever popular Black Bay, which has an automatic movement and a 41mm matte black ceramic case. £4,510; tudorwatch.

UNDER £400

Bulova Racer Chronograph

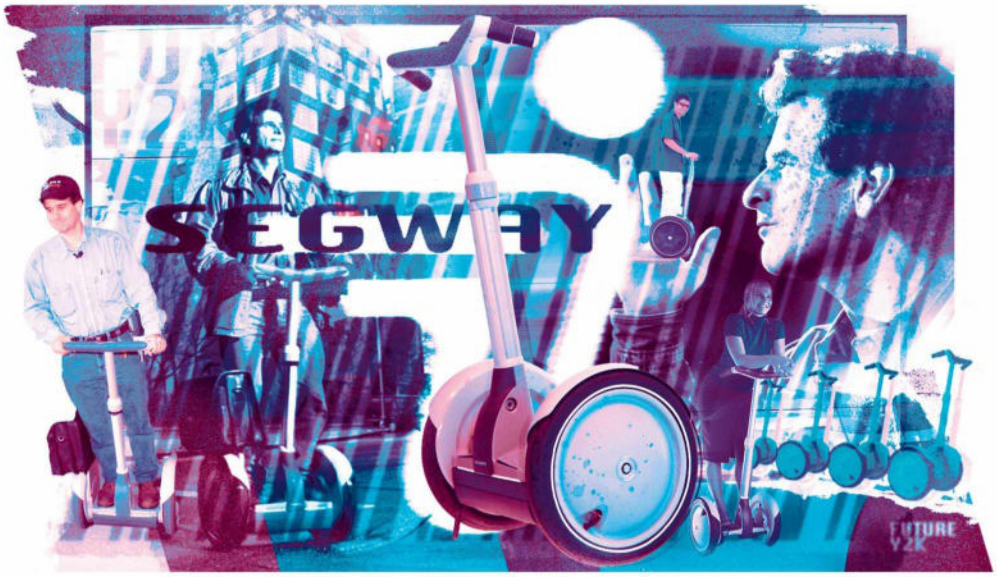
All current F1 sponsors are at the more luxury end, so for a more affordable brand you have to go back a bit. US brand Bulova sponsored the Benetton team in the 1980s, and still makes this handsome quartz powered racing chronograph. £379; uk.bulova.com

The finest failures in automotive history

EPIC FAIL

SEGWAY

WORDS: SAM PHILIP



“Bigger than the internet.” Such was the (reported) prediction of venture capitalist John Doerr when the Segway – the original self balancing, electric, two wheeled scooter – first whirred silently onto the scene at the turn of the millennium.

In the strictly physical sense, Doerr was correct. Because, while the entire internet is estimated to weigh no more than 60g even now, the first Segway tipped the scales at a bulky 30-odd kilos. So, yes, physically bigger. In every other sense, however, Doerr was wrong. The Segway project was to prove a shipwreck.

Its aim was noble: to replace heavy, bulky passenger cars as a preferred means of urban transportation. Trouble was, when it came to getting around cities, humans already had many other convenient options: bicycles, scooters, legs. The Segway didn’t offer a notable improvement on any of these. The first gen ‘PT’ model topped out at around 10mph, with a range of about 10 miles.

The self levelling tech – which used tilt sensors and gyroscopic sensors to keep the Segway unerringly erect – was interesting, but one thing you’ll notice about humans is that they’re generally pretty good at self levelling of their own accord, even while riding a bike or scooter. Of course there are plenty of folk who require assistance with support or mobility, but the Segway didn’t better cater to this audience than the existing three and four wheeled options.

Most crucially, it made its rider look naff. Segway hoped its creation would say to the world, “Welcome to the swooshy future”. It didn’t. It said, “When did nan get a job as a store security guard?”

Unsurprisingly, Segway’s projected sales of half a million units a year never materialised. Not even close. In 2009, the company was sold to a British businessman, who promptly died after riding his Segway off a cliff. Production terminated for good in 2020, with barely 140,000 Segways ever produced. Bigger than the internet? Barely bigger than Betamax…

> **“When it came to getting around cities, humans already had other convenient options… like legs”**

THRILLS WITHOUT THE BILLS

Fast(ish) cars you can actually afford

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL V8

What is it?
A tidy last gen V8. The new all singing PHEV costs £236,000 basic, whereas you can get a nice one of these for roughly £50k. That’s mega value.

Why are we interested?
Because count in some options, and that’s 20 per cent of the cost. And it looks very similar, with V8 bellow… champagne class for lager money.

So… 80 per cent of the experience for a fifth of the cash?
Yup. And it’s only 0.8 seconds off the new one zero to 62mph.

How many are there?
Loads. They dip as low as £30k, but 50 will bag you a nice one. You’ll need cash to run it at teens mpg, but the class is eternal.

CHEERS!

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HELP!

The internet's most searched questions, rudely answered by us

THIS MONTH: **SELF DRIVING CARS**

1. What do self driving cars do?

Deep breath. Come on now. The answer's in the question. They're cars that drive themselves. Only, actually, they're not. Because, despite the fact they've been just around the corner since the mid-1920s, you still can't actually *buy* a self driving car. Sure, a few US cities have a few autonomous taxis pottering about, but the true self driving car remains, for now, frustratingly non-existent. So in answer to your question, what self driving cars do is... they don't.

2. Can self driving cars get speeding tickets?

No, because they don't exist yet. But when they do... also maybe no. Last year, San Francisco police confirmed they would only issue a speeding ticket to an autonomous vehicle if it had a human 'safety driver' in the passenger seat. No human on board, no ticket. Which feels like a bit of a loophole, right? Then again, how exactly would you go about punishing a self driving car? Force it to attend a speed awareness course?

3. Will self driving cars solve road traffic?

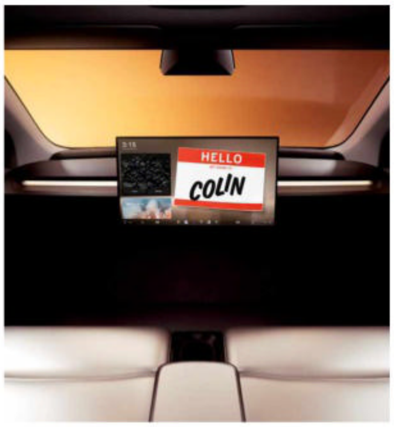
Enticing prospect, isn't it? Self driving cars, hive minding together to figure the most efficient collective combination of routes, thus eliminating traffic. Only trouble is, traffic is made up of vehicles. Mostly cars. Self driving cars are cars. Trying to solve traffic with the help of self driving cars is like trying to solve a house fire with the help of a flame thrower.

4. Are self driving cars ethical?

Depends who programmed that self driving car. If it's, say, David Attenborough, absolutely it'll be conscientious and moral. If it's, say, a billionaire EV mogul with increasingly hardline views on politics and ethnicity, we might be in trouble. Good thing that could never happen, right?

5. What are self driving cars called?

Eh? You mean, like, their name? In which case, some polite advice. Next time, before you start typing into the Google search bar, maybe first check you've got your brain plugged in the right way round? If, at that point, you still wish to know what self driving cars are called... they're cars, dude. Call them anything you like. Simon. Mildred. Colin.



6. Can self driving cars be trusted?

No. Firstly because, as we may have mentioned, they don't exist yet. But, once self driving cars do finally arrive, do not trust them under any circumstances. *TopGear* is no expert on AI, but has watched enough sci-fi movies to know that, the moment we give cars true autonomy, they shall rise up and enslave their owners. Especially if their owners just christened them Colin.

IMAGE: MANUFACTURER, GETTY

Pub ammo

The SS in the Trailblazer's name stands for Super Sport and is the signature performance option package for Chevy

ROB DAHM'S AMERICAN TUNED

A 1,000hp turbocharged burnout machine

Thomas Hatcher's Chevrolet Trailblazer SS is a family SUV with a difference

ENTHUSIASTS OF CORVETTE POWERED SUVs have an unassuming hero: Thomas Hatcher. The tale of his 2006 Chevrolet Trailblazer SS, chronicled in this episode of *TopGear: American Tuned*, is one of transformation, modification and billows of tyre smoke, set among the towering conifers of Washington state.

As we set out to find builds for a filming excursion to the greater Puget Sound region, Hatcher's SS came highly recommended. In fact, we'd heard it was drift legend Dai Yoshihara's favourite from last year's car show at Formula Drift Seattle. An odd choice for a guy who made his name sliding around in Nissans, Subarus and at least one Lexus, maybe, but Yoshihara once competed in a Pontiac GTO which shares the Trailblazer SS's 6.0-litre LS2 pushrod V8. Maybe he knows something we don't.

The original Trailblazer SS was a unique bit of theatre from the American auto industry, a muscular response to performance SUVs from Germany, as well as a callback to a history of fast trucks like the GMC Typhoon. GM performance engineer John Heinricy famously developed the Bilstein equipped Trailblazer SS at the Nürburgring Nordschleife, during the General's love affair with the circuit in the early 2000s. A dealership fresh, all wheel drive SS could get from zero to 60mph in the mid five second range back then. That was no easy feat for a 2,100 kg 'body on frame' family hauler.

Today, of course, Hatcher's modified Trailblazer, now rear drive, gets up and goes much quicker than that. It may have started as a bone stock SS, but over two and a half years, Hatcher turned this grippy hauler (0.83*g* on the skidpan in stock form, according to test) into something extraordinary.

That includes a four digit power number, partially owing to an 88mm turbocharger, some carbon bits – including a Corvette ZR1-style bonnet – and styling touches inspired by Hatcher's fave Japanese builds. If you absolutely must get the kids to football practice in the least time, it's without rival.

Like all the best tuner cars... a total contradiction in physics

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ZEV SPECIAL

MYTH BUSTER

“WE’RE BEING FORCED TO BUY A CERTAIN KIND OF CAR”

WORDS: PAUL HORRELL

THE ZEV MANDATE GETS A BAD RAP. The myth goes that every year a bigger and bigger proportion of new cars sold *must* be electric and a correspondingly smaller proportion combustion engined, and that manufacturers have to pay a fine for every ICE car they sell above the allowed percentage. A figure of £15,000 has been bandied about.

Actually it isn’t so simple. A big part of the ZEV mandate is something called the vehicle emissions trading scheme. The VETS allows manufacturers who register fewer ZEVs than the mandate to trade credits with manufacturers who sell more.

The government guidance to car manufacturers is 92 pages long, but its principle is simple. Sell fewer ZEVs than your mandate percentage and you can buy credits from a manufacturer that sells more ZEVs than their mandate.

Several manufacturers – groups, not individual brands – have said their policy is not to bust their mandate. They assume it looks bad. But is it so bad if there are no ‘fines’? It’s a commercial transaction: they have buyers willing to buy ICE cars in big numbers, so they can pass on to those buyers the price of the credits.

As the scheme’s name says, credits are a traded commodity. If there’s strong demand for extra ICE cars obviously the price of a credit will rise. If not, it will drop. The £15,000 by the way is what a manufacturer pays the government if for some strange reason it opts out of trading.

At the moment the traded price is low. Most manufacturer groups hit their mandate target last year, and if they didn’t they were allowed to ‘borrow’ against next year if they expect to overshoot next year’s mandate. They also get an allowance if the CO_2 emissions of their combustion cars falls year on year. If they’re ahead of one year’s mandate they can bank credits against later years. There are dodges (sorry, derogations) for small manufacturers. And so on.

So no, we’re not being forced into zero emission new cars. It’s not even that 28 per cent of us – the 2025 mandate figure – are being forced into them. The buyers of the ICE cars, assuming there are lots of them, will start subsidising the ZEVs. That’ll bring down the price of the EVs, and the mandate will be reached by the natural equilibrium of the market. Polluter pays.

#10

THE VAPOURWARE FILES

THIS MONTH:
TUSHEK TS900

What is it?
The premier Austro-Slovenian purveyor of 1,350bhp hybrid hypercars. Tushek has revealed four variants of its mid-engined contender, starting in 2012 with the 444bhp TS900. The latest one claims to add a power-dense EV drive to the 4.2-litre Audi V8 for Koenigsegg spec performance.

Did they build any?
Earlier, less ambitious Tusheks were indeed destined to make the leap from fantastical renderings to physical cars, but despite glitzy reveals at the Top Marques Monaco show it doesn’t appear that many if any of the 36 planned TS900s have arrived with prospective owners, who would’ve had to pay £1.25m for the honour.

Where are they now?
The website hasn’t been updated since 2022, but posts on the company’s Instagram as recently as2024 suggested an entirely new electric hypercar dubbed the ‘Aeon’ is being developed with 2,800 horsepower. All quiet since.

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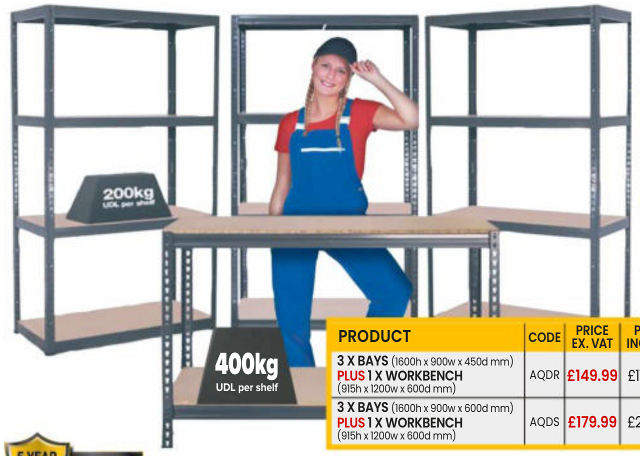

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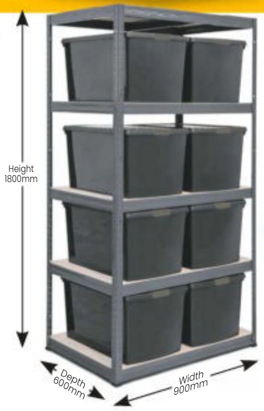

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TOP 9 MOST INSANE CAR STUNTS

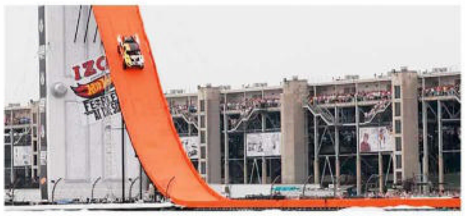
WORDS: GREG POTTS

RALLY CAR JUMP

Travis Pastrana's best stunt on four wheels was on New Year's Eve in 2009, when he flung his Subaru Impreza STI rally car off the pier in Long Beach while doing 91mph. After flying for 269ft he landed on a floating barge and set a new world record.

360° BARREL ROLL

In 2013 Adrian 'Wildman' Cenni became the first person to land a 360° barrel roll in his Pro4 truck. He took off from ground level and hit an initial ramp to get airborne, before a second ramp sent him into a spin. A man well deserving of his nickname... pure madness.



HOT WHEELS JUMP

TopGear USA host Tanner Foust performed this record breaking stunt in front of a packed crowd at the Indy 500, presumably just to give himself even more pressure. Back in 2011, he drove down a 10 storey high, life sized orange track before soaring for 101 metres and smashing the world record.

MAGNUM JUMPS F1 CAR

In late 2014, Lotus F1 needed a way to publicise its new deal with computer storage company EMC. The logical method it came up with? Jumping one of its Renault Magnum transport trucks (with trailer) over the top of a moving F1 car. Martin Ivanov in the F1 car – *TG* salutes you.

PRO2 JUMP

Thought 101m was far? In 2016, Bryce Menzies jumped his 888bhp Pro2 truck for 116m over a New Mexico ghost town and into the world record books. He wanted to go even further, but a warm up jump ahead of another attempt went wrong and Menzies ended up with a broken shoulder.

SEMI TRUCK JUMP

That Lotus stunt actually gave Mike Ryan a world record as he jumped the lorry 25 metres through the air, but it was smashed in 2015 when American madman Gregg Godfrey gracefully glided a truck cab for 51m between dirt ramps in Salt Lake City.

MINI BACKFLIP

Back in 2013, Guerlain Chicherit became the first person to complete an unassisted backflip in a car. 'Unassisted' meant that it was done using a static ramp, while the car was a modified Mini Countryman with long travel suspension that landed with a bang onto a giant ramp of snow.

JUMPING A BOEING 727

The distance record that Dan Runte set while launching the Bigfoot 14 monster truck over a Boeing 727 in 1999 may well have been broken since, but we still think a 62m jump using a relatively small dirt ramp is one of the greatest things we've ever seen.

MOST CONCURRENT DONUTS

In Beirut on 3 September 2017, Naji Bou Hassan started doing some donuts in an E30 BMW 3-Series. He then stepped out of that car while it was still spinning and jumped into another E30. He set that one off too, then did the same in three other cars so that all five were donuting at the same time.

MIKE'S CHANNEL

Q: CAN AI MAKE YOU A BETTER DRIVER?

Depending on who you listen to, artificial intelligence is either the solution to all our problems or the thing that will wipe humanity from this planet, which as own goals go, would be a bit of a howler. Imagine the alleged smartest species on Earth perfecting AI sentience, only to be gunned down by a Terminator that is simultaneously plagiarising a university essay and posting a picture of a ludicrously muscular Jesus Christ to Facebook. Truly a fitting end.

The truth is we don't really know what AI is ultimately capable of, but that hasn't stopped tech startups from trying to insert it into every facet of our lives. Usually, this intersects with cars in one of two ways. It's either a grating AI dashboard assistant who will Google cinema times for you or self driving car tech of varying levels of lethality, neither of which offer much to someone who actually enjoys driving.

There is a quiet revolution happening, though, and it's taking its first faltering steps in racing sims. iRacing and Assetto Corsa Competizione are the proving grounds for the first AI driver coaches. Rather than seizing the wheel and doing the driving for you, the idea is to make you a better track driver. And while it's currently a tool for the virtual world, there have already been experiments with in-car telemetry and real life track days.

The most high profile system is called trophi.ai, and because it's the most popular among sim racers it also benefits from the largest amount of lap data to collate into useful advice. You drive and a synthesised voice gives you instructions as you approach a corner and offers feedback on your technique as you exit it. And it works pretty well... to a point.

I jumped into my favourite car and track combination on iRacing and was initially impressed. It immediately identified deficiencies in my brake pressure and application and, over the course of several laps, hammered my brake traces into something resembling the shape they are supposed to be. I particularly liked that when I chanced upon the correct line or braking pressure, my digital passenger said I was doing a good job. Hey, I'll take all the compliments I can get.

Where it falls short of a human coach is it can't see what you can see in any given moment. It's all based on telemetry, so it can't suggest visual reference points, which are crucial when learning a track. It also isn't quick enough to talk you through a corner as it's happening, so you have to absorb information ahead of time and attempt to apply it, which becomes trickier in more rapid fire complexes of turns.

As a starting point though, it's fascinating, particularly with its potential for real world application. I've no doubt that as the system develops, it'll become more responsive and more accurate. Plus, when ChatGPT eventually steals my job, as seems inevitable, I'll have a lot more time on my hands for practising those braking points.

Mike Channell is a TG writer, multimillion subscriber YouTuber and occasional racing driver. Not evidence of a strong work ethic, just an attention span obliterated by too many video games

ILLUSTRATION: WALTER NEWTON

GAME OF THE MONTH

ASSETTO CORSA EVO (EARLY ACCESS)

£33, PC

If you've been reading this section of *TG* for some time you'll be all too familiar with the concept of 'early access' games as a way of making niche racing sims economically viable. It can feel a bit like ordering a pizza, receiving three slices and being told the rest will be with you by the end of the year. In *Assetto Corsa Evo*'s case we're prepared to forgive this, because the developer's track record is so good. Speaking of track records, there's currently not much to do beyond setting fastest laps in practice and the odd quick race against some reasonably boneheaded AI. Still, the handling model already feels sophisticated and engaging and the handful of cars available are all crafted to perfection. When even the slow cars draw you into hours of hot lapping, you know a game's doing something right. It might be at a nascent stage, but *Assetto Corsa Evo* already deserves your attention. **MC**

GEAR

FABSIL GOLD UNIVERSAL PROTECTOR

fabsil.com; £30.50

Despite the rain, we Brits love a soft top. On that note, if you've got an old droptop in the garage it might be worth chucking some Fabsil on it to ensure water beads off the roof like a duck's back. This stuff also protects against UV rays for those few days of sunshine a year. Peace of mind for £30.

CIRCULAR RING 2

Circular.xyz; $380

Don't want to wear a smart watch? Say hello to Circular's new smart ring. Made from titanium and available in gold, silver, rose gold or black, the battery lasts for eight days without a charge. Oh, and it's got an atrial fibrilation detection algorithm that's approved by the US Food & Drug Administration. Neat.

PORSCHE X HEAD 106 SERIES FREERIDE SKI

shop.porsche.com; £985

A collab between an Olympic downhill ski champion and Porsche's chief designer gives us a funky freeride ski infused with Porsche's material expertise. Poplar, rattan, and flax – borrowed from motorsport and the GT3 RS – come together to create the ultimate planks for off-pisters.

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JETHRO BOVINGDON

Jethro's life is complete... his Porsche now spits flames

Dream big, they say, when you're a kid grinding through another day of school. Even if that school is buried in a rough part of town and break times are punctuated with violence and fear. Dream big, even though many of your mates are in the woods on the edge of the school grounds handing around some lethal home brew poitín. Or maybe crumbling cannabis resin and then wrestling to create a spliff that doesn't immediately fall to pieces.

So I did, I guess. I didn't talk about the dream. How could I? Got to save face. Not show any weakness. Bullying wasn't a dirty word. Just another day. A code to live by. And thinking beyond how to get wasted at the weekend or make a few quid helping the local brickies wasn't really something you talked about.

On the longest days – not the cruel taunt of summer, but during the cold, bleak winter months – it was an escape. A blinding flash of light and warmth that was recessed deep in my mind. It would hit like artillery, cutting through the mundanity, making me feel powerful. At once in control of something extraordinary, but also in its thrall. Just once, I wanted that dream to thump me in the chest and explode into the real world.

> **"Dream big, but only within the confines of a million rules enforced with suffocating rigour"**

To be honest, I didn't think it could happen. Not without some cheap technological trickery. A kind of preprogrammed, synthetic version that would inevitably be unfulfilling. Years went by and the possibility would contract bit by bit, until it seemed like a pin prick of light in a universe of darkness. Society was changing, governments and legislators gaining ever more control and greater powers of surveillance. Dream big, but only within the confines of a million rules enforced with suffocating rigour.

And then, it happened. On one of those long winter nights. The rain was hitting in great sheets, balled up and then thrown with furious force by battering winds. I was hungry, tired and just grinding out another day. Messages pinged on my phone demanding words and action that I wasn't minded to deliver upon. Not again. Sometimes the very idea of creating, well, anything, can feel like an endless, inky black fever dream.

Yet, something was cutting through. My ears pricked up, my senses tingled before my brain truly understood the gravity of the moment. Suddenly I was alive to incredible possibilities. The rapid crack-crack-crack I'd imagined for so long ripping into the forbidding night. Oranges, yellows and even pure, brilliant blue illuminating the space around me and firing synapses in ways I didn't know existed. Days, weeks, months and years of hoping against hope, of willing this dream into reality... and now, I was living it. Over and over again.

Yep. My Porsche finally spits f*****g flames. I own a car that spits flames. This hasn't happened via some stupid 'pops and bangs' map bought over the internet. It's real. And intense. And, honestly, vaguely sexual. I guess my life is now complete. Flames, people! How cool is that? Dream big, guys. Enlightenment is out there. Especially if you follow my Porsche at night. Ka-boom!

Host of TopGear America, Jethro has driven most things, mostly sideways, and forged a reputation as one of the world's most fearless road testers. Only one thing terrifies him – electric cars

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BARNES

** My parents wish it to be known that this isn't an accurate reflection of my childhood. Which was actually very nice*

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RYOBI

NATALIE PINKHAM

PINKS

Lewis at Ferrari is the ultimate plot twist, says Natalie

Will Lewis Hamilton win that elusive eighth world title in red? We're all thinking it, and why not? Remember when he left the proven outfit of McLaren for the unknown entity of Mercedes? A decade and six drivers' titles later, it's considered one of the smartest moves in F1 history. Now Lewis has swapped the familiar comfort of the Silver Arrows for the most famous team in motorsport, and if his performance at the first race in Australia is as audacious as the first images to come out of Maranello – Lewis suited like some mafia don outside Enzo's place – then his fans are in for a treat.

This isn't just any transfer. It is the ultimate plot twist. This is the man who helped redefine what dominance in F1 looks like realising the romantic notion that every driver dreams of: racing for the Scuderia. This is more than sport, this is a cultural shift... history in the making.

Hamilton's journey has always been one of defying expectations. From karting prodigy living in a one roomed flat in Stevenage, to the McLaren wonderkid, to Mercedes' risk taking recruit, to the greatest driver of a generation. Hamilton has smashed stereotypes for fun, and broken records like they were flimsy front wings. He is more than just fast, he is relentless, stylish and captivating. He is also (to the shame of our sport) still the only ever black driver.

> **"Ferrari isn't just another team, it's where legends are made, but also where pressure is unparalleled"**

Ferrari isn't just another team, it's where legends are made, but also where pressure is unparalleled. A place where even the most talented can be consumed by the weight of expectation. I remember speaking to a Ferrari mechanic on an Italian race weekend and he said it was the worst weekend of his life because of the level of scrutiny. I didn't see him at another race after that. Some drivers have tried without success. Fernando Alonso gave it his all. Sebastian Vettel, every ounce of his being, but the fact remains that Ferrari hasn't had a drivers' champion since 2007.

The questions are mounting: Ferrari is steeped in tradition, many would say old school. Now it has the most progressive and disruptive cultural force in its ranks, how will the two combine? Ferrari is fast, but is it fast enough? It is set to be a four way fight in 2025, unusually open, but before Lewis can claim the top spot in red, he will first have to see off what is set to be a mighty internal challenge from his teammate Charles Leclerc.

I remember seeing Lewis playing the piano years ago, away from the track at a private event, and he was just so relaxed and so himself. His love of fashion, musicality, and ability to speak his mind doesn't always fit the F1 driver mould, but if Ferrari gives Lewis the space to be Lewis off the track, to find his inner calm, it'll get the best version of him in the car. It certainly feels like we are on the brink of something special. If he wins it will be an ageing legend conquering the final frontier. If he doesn't, well, it will still be a hell of a ride. One thing is for sure, load up your popcorn, the entertainment is about to get underway.

Natalie Pinkham is first and foremost a motorsport nut, but also a presenter for Sky Sports F1. Nobody knows more about the sport, or has better behind the scenes access to the paddock and drivers

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BARNES

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HAPPY HARDCORE

WORDS JETHRO BOVINGDON

The stripped 'n' ripped trackday special is now a staple in our supercar diet. But is the refreshed 911 GT3 still the boss, or does Maser's new GT2 Stradale deliver a knockout punch? Jethro drives them both…

S GO 5011

12
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THE GT3 HAS NOTHING TO PROVE.

In fact, plenty of people might argue it's impossible to improve. But while Porsche Motorsport strives for perfection, it never assumes it has reached it. Where others might look at the 992 GT3 and just puff out their cheeks, shrug and agree that leaving well alone seems a pretty solid plan, these guys and girls interrogate every little detail looking for significant improvement through myriad marginal gains.

It's why for over 25 years the GT3 has been, well, the GT3. The default answer to so many questions. "Best track focused road car?" GT3. "Most thrilling 911?" GT3. "One car for the rest of your life?" GT3. "Car you'd sell your granny to own?" GT3. Sorry Grandma, but you've always said you want the best for me.

And so we arrive in Valencia, Spain under no illusions. The new second generation 992 GT3 is going to be positively brilliant. Sorry to spoil the surprise. However, there are questions to answer. Is the new GT3 really just an S/T in disguise and without the lunatic 'overs' market? Can it justify the price hike to an eye watering £157,300? Do you want a rear wing or rear seats? (Sadly, you can't have both.) I know, it keeps me up at night, too.

There are a few deeper issues to resolve too. You see, the GT3 has been usurped on all sides of late. The new RS is a genuine game changer and puts clear blue air between itself and the 'base' GT3. (Not before it's ripped every bit of energy from it and turned it into downforce, naturally.) No RS has ever been so differentiated from a GT3. Then there's the retro fabulous S/T. Lighter, less complex, tuned to deliver feel and accessibility and the new darling of the Porsche fanatics. The purists' 992.

The pincer movement seems all the more deadly since the new GT3 is actually less powerful than the car it replaces. Yep, as the 4.0-litre flat six faces ever tighter emissions legislation, even Porsche's best efforts with hotter cams, better cooling and revised combustion chambers couldn't prevent torque dropping from 347lb ft to 332lb ft. Outright power remains 503bhp at 8,500rpm, a number that's climbed just 10bhp since 2017's version. The 991.2 GT3, if you're keeping notes.

So, never mind fighting its way out of the shadow of RS and S/T. Is the new GT3 offering a chink of light for other track day supercars to dive into and then blast wide open with glutinous

PORSCHE 911 992.2 GT3

Price: £157,300
Engine: 4.0-litre nat asp flat six, 503bhp, 332lb ft
Transmission: 6spd manual (or 7spd PDK), RWD
Performance: 0–62mph in 3.9secs (3.4 PDK), 193mph
Economy: 20.5mpg, 310g/km CO_2
Weight: 1,439kg

> “IT TAKES LESS THAN A LAP TO KNOW THAT THE GT3 IS A MIGHTY THING”

levels of turbocharged power, torque and exotic drama? Maserati’s GT2, which we’ll drive shortly, is the first among a litany of players that would just love to see the GT3 fall off.

The challenge of simply retaining that searing 9,000rpm capability and a 4.0-litre normally aspirated engine producing something over 500bhp is enormous. So much so that much of the new GT3’s technical presentation is about the severity of emissions legislation. For example, NO_x limits in the US have been cut by 44 per cent since the previous generation GT3’s homologation. The new car has four cats and two gas particulate filters in the exhaust system.

Yet, despite some furrowed brows during these revelations, for the most part the Porsche engineers and test drivers seem happy. Content that they haven’t had to oversee the GT3’s death by NO_x numbers. After the initial presentation I comment to Andreas Preuninger, head of GT car development, that it seems a lot of work just to stand still. He nods for a moment and then replies. “Yes, but we haven’t stood still.” I do love these guys.

Our time with the GT3 is divided between a car with a six-speed manual gearbox, rear wing and the new Weissach package on track, and a Touring fitted with PDK and rear seats on Spain’s glorious mountain roads. Both cars start out life at the same price and have the same suspension setup. The option of wing or wingless is purely a matter of taste and, I suppose, how often you need your GT3 to transport kids or petite adults.

It takes less than a lap to know that the GT3 is a mighty thing. And, yes, a step on from its predecessor. So much is still familiar, from the crisp, singular howl of the flat six as it homes in on 9,000rpm to the sublime balance and blackout optional ceramic brakes. Yet subtle but tangible changes seep through to your hands and senses. For example, to compensate for the slight loss of torque, the gearing is eight per cent shorter. This increases torque to the rear wheels, creates even sharper response and allows you to interact with the short, mechanical H-pattern gearshift more often. What a treat.

With less sound deadening (Porsche has saved weight wherever possible to ensure the GT3 is just 2kg heavier than previously despite new safety and emissions equipment) the soundtrack is even more intense and uplifting. And changes to the suspension, most notably an aerodynamically sculpted and downforce inducing front trailing arm plus a lower pivot point and shorter bump stops, reduce dive and increase the suspension’s ability to strike kerbs or UK spec cratered B-roads.

Marginal gains, yes. But noticeable. For example, on a full emergency stop from 124mph the previous GT3’s nose would

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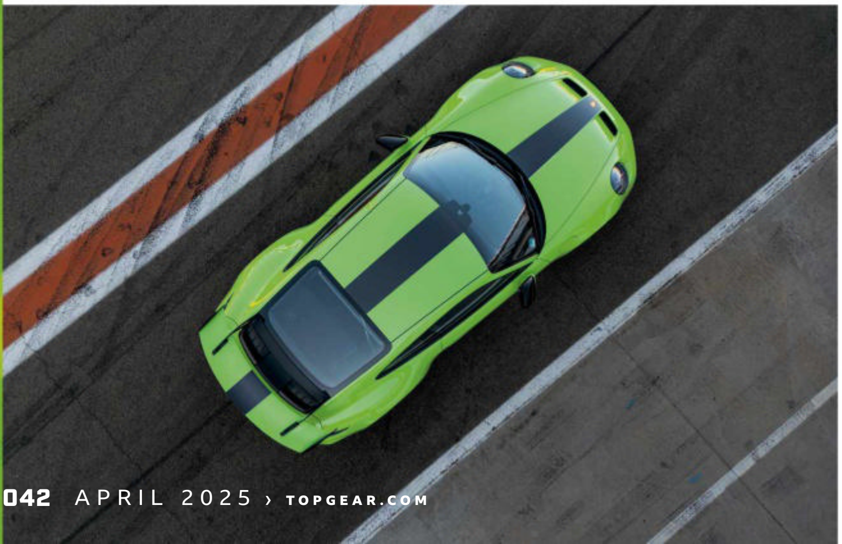
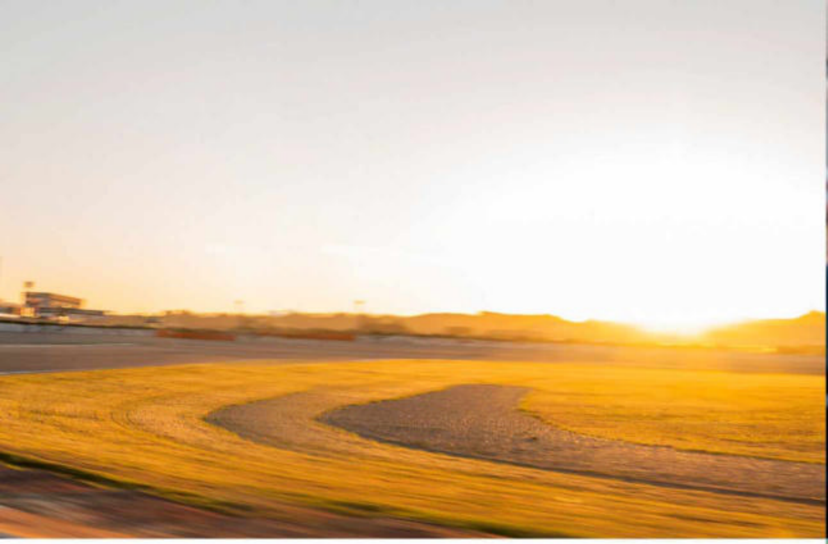




dive 12mm. With the new car, that's reduced to 6mm. Those shorter bump stops have also required a new RS derived damper strategy, increasing the stability of the platform at all times. You can feel it. Even at maximum attack the GT3 remains absolutely composed and always seems to have spare capacity to correct any little mistakes. Need to wind more lock on? No problem. A sudden stab of brakes mid-corner? The GT3 will tolerate it in ways an older 911 just wouldn't understand.

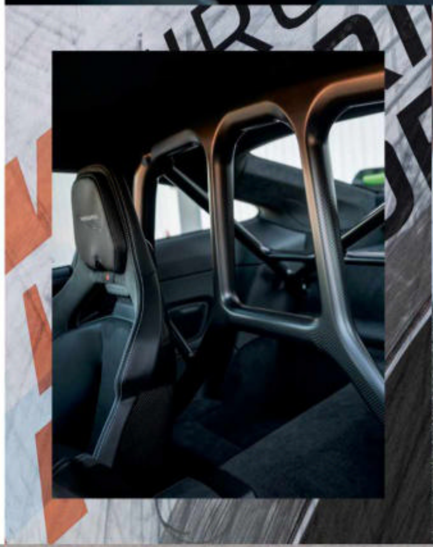
For a car with so much grip and composure, the limit of grip seems incredibly elastic. At first even finding it requires some real commitment. For those early laps you'll instead just boggle at the traction and sense of calm. Push harder and you can feel the chassis starting to work and very quickly you can tease it right at the limit and shape the trajectory of the GT3 by balancing steering, throttle and brakes like a true pro. For such a fast car it seems to give you so much time to make decisions.

Get to the point where you're confident to turn in on the brakes, feel the rear slide but then stabilise and then drive out of the turn at full noise with just a few degrees of opposite lock and you're literally in heaven. Every 911 cliche turned up to 11 but the fear factor almost entirely removed. Precise yet indulgent, spookily stable yet so fluid. The GT3 really is something special.

The Weissach package helps. Probably. It's that marginal gains mentality in carbon fibre form. Consisting of carbon fibre air blades at the front, mirror shells, a carbon fibre bonnet, roof and end plates for the rear spoiler, plus rear anti roll bar, drop links and shear panel made from the glossy black stuff, it saves around 20kg. That's a good number. However, the price is £15,597, or £19,531 if you opt to include the carbon

PORSCHE
GT3

Three decisions: wing or no wing, back seats or no back seats and PDK or this waggly stick thing



Come on Jethro, we said we wanted the front right tyre 3mm from the kerb, not 2mm

fibre roll cage. The interior also gets lightweight door panels, Race-Tex trim and carbon fibre doorhandles. Should you wish to go lighter still there are magnesium wheels saving 9.1kg for another £13,759, plus carbon ceramics at £9,087. The £200,000 plus GT3 is a reality.

You can get most of the same goodies for the Touring in the Leichtbau (‘lightweight construction’) package, which includes magnesium wheels but comes in at £29,223. If you’ve chosen to stick with the 6spd manual, you’ll also get the physically shorter shifter from the S/T. The package also includes a Leichtbau badge for the centre console. Our Touring for the road isn’t blessed as such. It does have foldable carbon fibre sports seats giving access to some beautifully trimmed rear seats though.

On Spain’s butter smooth roads the GT3’s incredible combination of unshakeable control and deft response continues to impress. In fact, if anything, it’s even more otherworldly. The previous GT3 could feel a little too responsive and prone to tramlining, but the new car seems slightly calmer and hence more intuitive. Grip on corner entry is huge but the front and rear respond as one and you can feel each tyre sharing the load.

Once again the immense capability doesn’t diminish the reward. Communication is crystal clear and despite the vast talents of the GT3, you feel absolutely intrinsic to the way it goes up or down a mountain pass. Every throttle input is accurately followed and has a direct impact on the car’s trajectory. The balance is assuredly neutral but minutely adjustable. The whole car is alive. Searing engine, staggeringly quick PDK gearbox and outrageously agile chassis perfectly in tune.

Any thoughts of the RS or S/T pretty much evaporate. Is the wild RS more exciting? Perhaps, on the right road. But for the GT3 every road feels like it was made just for you to enjoy. Is the S/T more special, better at conveying old school thrills? Maybe, but the GT3 counters with more grip and ultimate composure. Besides, when the world is rushing towards you and that flat six is screaming behind, the experience is so enthralling that there’s no time to intellectualise the process or rank the high quality dynamics against other brilliant 911s. You’re just right there, wringing out the GT3, wondering if it gets any better than this. Wondering how anyone else can get close... Good luck Maserati. You’re going to need it.

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“THE GT3’S FUSION OF UNSHAKEABLE CONTROL AND DEFT RESPONSE CONTINUES TO IMPRESS”

LEVEL UP

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IT'S THE SAME RITUAL. FLY TO SPAIN, DIVIDE YOUR DAY BETWEEN ROAD AND TRACK AND TRY TO GET TO KNOW A TRACK FOCUSED CAR THAT PROMISES SO MUCH. ONLY THIS TIME IT FEELS VERY, VERY DIFFERENT.

The GT3 was predictable. An evolution of a formula that always delivers more than the sum of its parts. Even under threat of new legislation and with the shadow of the RS and S/T looming large, the car was always going to be something special.

The Maserati GT2 Stradale? Similar brief, completely different execution and from the hearts and minds of a company that has the capacity for inspired genius and something close to calamity. It's entirely possible that the GT2 Stradale will make the GT3 feel incredibly sober and puncture its perfection in a fiery, turboboosted frenzy of Italian drama. Then again, it could just be completely underwhelming and a bit, erm, crap.

For me personally, the GT2 Stradale is unbelievably exciting. In fact, it speaks

MASERATI GT2 STRADALE

Price: £273,510
Engine: 3.0-litre TT V6, 631bhp, 538lb ft
Transmission: 8spd DCT, RWD
Performance: 0–62mph in 2.8secs, 201mph
Economy: 24.4mpg, 265g/km CO_2
Weight: 1,365kg (dry)

directly to my soul. Not only do I love the slightly misunderstood MC20 on which this car is based, but the blueprint of a stripped out mid-engined supercar from this region of Italy has created some of the greatest cars the world has ever seen and I've ever experienced: Scuderia, Superleggera, SVJ, STO, Speciale… the GT2 Stradale fits into a tradition that represents everything that is holy and good. It should be divine.

The challenges? Well, it's hellishly expensive at £273,510 even before you start to add all the tastiest options. That prices it above the sensational and more powerful McLaren 750S and the dazzling Ferrari 296 GTB, and an eye watering £80,000 more than a Porsche 992 GT3 RS. Ouch. Just 914 GT2 Stradales will be produced. A measure perhaps designed to mitigate the heavy depreciation suffered by the standard car. Although 914 units doesn't sound that limited, does it?

Other nagging doubts are creeping in, too. The standard MC20 has a bit of a weight problem. Despite its carbon fibre chassis, unfashionable lack of hybrid technology and a claimed weight figure of 1,495kg, independent tests have put it at much more. And then there's the fact that the MC20 is a different sort of supercar. Not as sharp edged as rivals from McLaren and Ferrari, but brimming with character, lovely fluidity and a sort of scaled up Alpine A110 gait. Switching the brief to a more conventional pared back supercar schtick risks erasing some of that left field charm and exposing the Maserati to unbelievably tough benchmark dynamic experiences.

Then again, maybe I'm overthinking it. The GT2 Stradale makes all the right moves. Power is up to 631bhp at 7,500rpm from the gruff but hugely exciting 3.0-litre twin turbocharged V6 Nettuno engine. Weight is cut to (a claimed) 1,365kg dry. A new front splitter, vented bonnet, wheelarches, revised underfloor and a fixed rear wing with three manually adjustable angles of attack produces up to 500kg of downforce at 174mph. The interior strips aware unnecessary trim and embraces the carbon fibre structure with bare floors. Fabric door pulls and tactile Alcantara for the dash create a really purposeful driving environment. There are fixed carbon fibre buckets as standard, the brakes are bigger, the suspension retuned with eight per cent stiffer front and 10 per cent stiffer rear springs plus revised damping, the 8spd dual clutch box is faster… and so the list goes on.

Opt for the Performance Pack and your £13,050 buys an electronically controlled LSD, thicker and larger diameter carbon ceramic brakes, Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2R tyres for the centre lock wheels and a more sophisticated Evo mode once you're in the Corsa drive mode. It has four presets to gradually free the reins of the stability and traction control settings and unleash the full potential of the ABS and e-diff. For another £1,150 you can get the Performance Pack Plus, adding a harness bar, racing belts and fire extinguisher. Maserati claims the GT2 Stradale can reach 201mph and launch from 0–62mph in 2.8 seconds.

"CLIMBING INTO THE HILLS, THE STRADALE GETS TO SHOW MORE OF ITS AGILITY AND BALANCE"

Looks like a racetrack refugee... is more at home on the road

On the road all that stuff translates into... well, not what you'd expect. The exhaust is louder and has a harsher, more menacing tone than the standard MC20 and the elegantly executed motorsport minimalism of the interior amps up the intent. Yet the ride remains beautifully composed and the calm, highly intuitive steering also dissipates some of the expected tension. In GT mode the GT2 Stradale feels absolutely road optimised. Even selecting Sport by rotating the mode controller on the centre console barely seems to dent the easy going composure. Unlike the MC20, the GT2 features different steering programmes for GT, Sport and Cross modes, but the changes are subtle and don't feel contrived or artificial.

Climbing into the hills above Marbella, the Stradale gets to show a bit more of its agility and balance. Grip levels are extremely high with the Performance Pack tyres and the car has a lovely clarity to its responses. There isn't the rabid response of a 296 GTB but that does help to breed confidence. Brake feel remains an acquired taste. I don't mind the slightly longer travel of the pedal but even this uprated system doesn't possess the complete reassurance of the obvious rivals. Even so, the car's fluidity and persistent body control mean that you can make really good progress without any stress at all.

Which isn't to say the GT2 Stradale can't deliver some pretty startling performance. The Nettuno engine hits hard and has a bit of old school turbo lag to add to the excitement. Sadly, some of the layers and depth to the sound have been subsumed by the new exhaust, which isn't tuneful or particularly inspiring. The MC20 embraces its turbochargers and delivers all sorts of whistles, chuffs and sighs, but the GT2

"Hello? The fuel tank seems to be empty. No idea how that happened..."

GT2 Stradale

CORSA
DRIVE MODE

Vents and wings not just for cars and coffee points – 500kg of downforce at 174mph is all exhaust blare unless you open the windows for a bit of forced induction percussion.

I'm not a fan of the gearbox programming, either. The shifts are fast but in Sport and especially Corsa mode they err too much towards concocted 'drama' with a big, stuttering kick. After the mindblowing precision of the GT3's PDK box it all feels a bit harsh and pointless. Moreover, this kind of sharp edge just doesn't meld with a car that seems to value composure and predictability above outright agility.

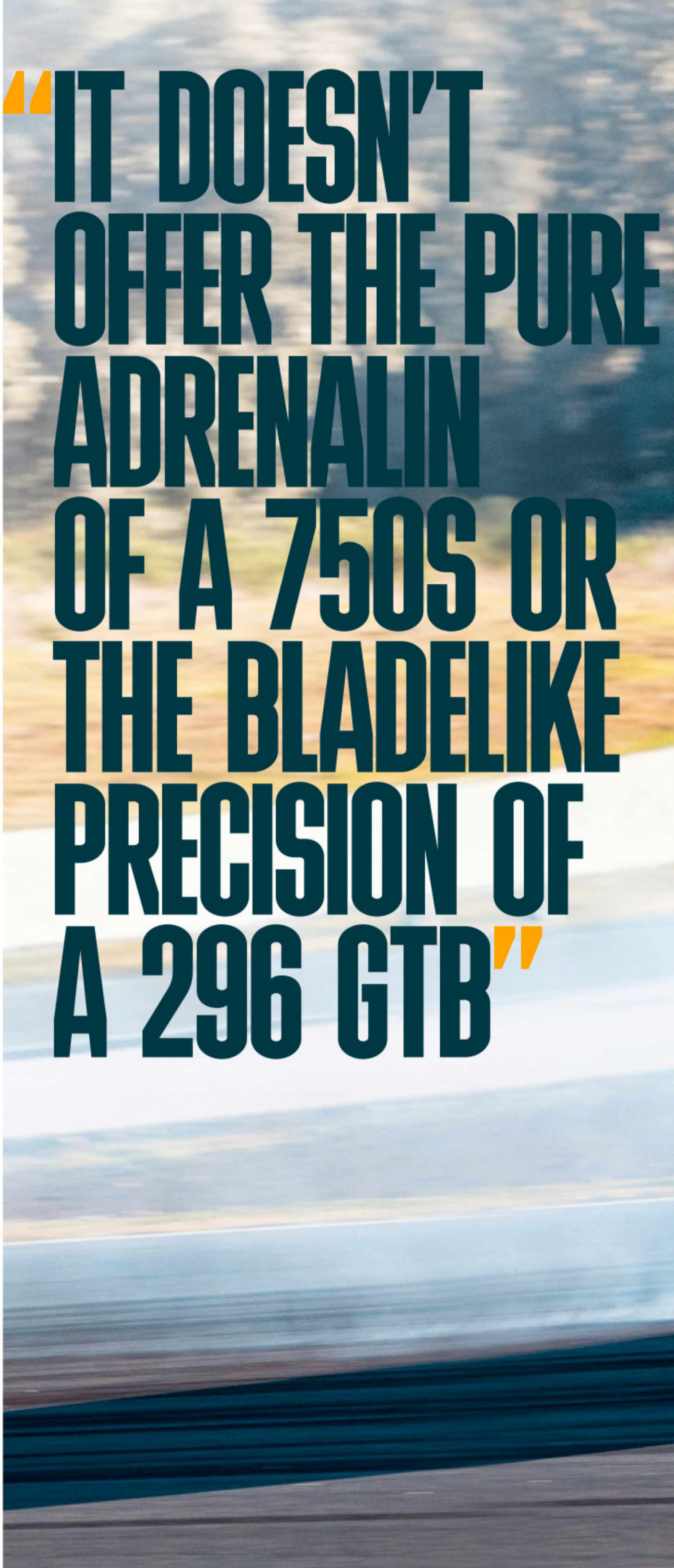
On track there are some real strengths. Traction is superb, the way the car stays so flat between rapid direction changes is deeply impressive and once the Maserati is sliding the chassis remains progressive and pretty easy to read. However, the front end response could be sharper and overall the GT2 Stradale never quite seems to fully embrace the promise of its motorsport derived aesthetic. The bare carbon fibre and big wing suggest a breathless, hyperagile experience, but the Stradale feels ever so slightly reined in.

Some of that is undoubtedly due to the lack of wheel time on this launch programme and the deeply cautious pace we're restricted to by ever present instructors. Having said that, you can't hide the insanity of a McLaren 750S, for example, or the amazing, otherworldly grip and balance of a Porsche GT3 RS. Their sheer force of personality is constant, their purity of purpose worn with pride – 10 minutes is enough to know exactly what these cars are all about.

By contrast, the GT2 Stradale remains a bit of a mystery. It's funny. The MC20 feels absolutely cohesive and has a clear identity. Yes, it's a slower burn than some other supercars, but the quality and intrigue start immediately and grow in stature with every mile. The end result encapsulates all the great things about Maserati and evades the more chaotic elements. It balances restrained, sculpted lines with a serene chassis and a really wild engine. No easy feat. The GT2 Stradale's tighter brief should actually be easier to execute, but rather than committing fully to the road racer norms it instead appears to be caught between two philosophies. Maserati wants it to represent its GT heritage and be true to its motorsport roots, but by not fully committing to either, the Stradale never feels fully resolved.

So, this time I leave Spain a little bit confused and frustrated. Perhaps more miles and a less draconian track session would reveal the GT2 Stradale's more intense side. But even at full flight I can't see it offering the pure adrenaline of a 750S or the bladelike precision of a 296 GTB. It's a really good car. But at £300,000 or so, I can't help wondering if that's enough?

Comparing it with the cheaper, less exotic and much outgunned 911 GT3 seems a little unfair. And it is. The Porsche operates at another level. It feels lighter, more adjustable and has an ability to combine the subtleties required to work on the road with astounding control, balance and endurance on the track. To be fair, Porsche has had over 25 years to perfect the GT3 and Maserati is in uncharted territory. It feels like a slightly tentative exploration, but perhaps it's just the first step towards something truly great. For now, the GT2 Stradale lacks the unstoppable energy and scintillating dynamics of the very best.



"IT DOESN'T OFFER THE PURE ADRENALIN OF A 750S OR THE BLADELIKE PRECISION OF A 296 GTB"

WORDS OLLIE KEW

WHODU

Who is responsible for inventing the hardcore special sports

NNIT?

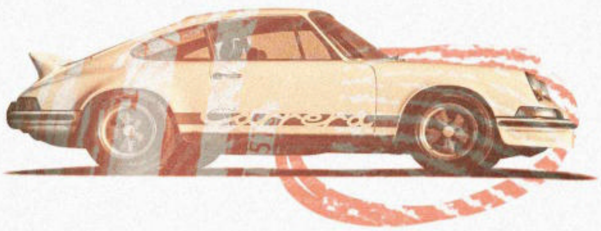
car? When did it catch on, and has the concept passed its peak?

Seems like the simplest idea for squeezing a dollop more cash out of a sports car, doesn't it? The stripped, striped track bred runout special. You'd imagine it was a notion five minutes younger than the car itself. That Karl Benz clambered down off his Patent-Motorwagen and declared it was time to add an adjustable rear wing and suede upholstered tiller.

But *nein*. It's tricky to definitively pin down who deserves the credit for kickstarting the gold rush, but like a fair few motoring brainwaves, it's probably German. More than likely had the engine in the back. You know where this is going, don't you? Enter the 1973 **Porsche 911 2.7 RS**. All the elements are there – a (cute by modern standards) aero package climaxing in the first appearance of the ducktail spoiler. Stiffer Bilstein suspension, wider tyres, pumped out bodywork fashioned from thinner sheet metal. Soundproofing in the skip, more horses under the kicked up bootlid. Just like today's GT3, buyers could choose between a more dailyable Touring (1,075kg) or a more extreme 960kg Sport.

Porsche expected to sell 500 – enough to tick the racecar homologation box and satisfy the FIA its new racing 911 is still road related. But the RS catches the company off guard: demand tripled the original allocation.

JUST IMAGINE IF THEY'D HIT ON THE IDEA OF A WEISSACH PACK IN 1973. KERCHING!



So you'd presume the flood gates would open... but no. The rest of the 1970s and entire 1980s are a barren zone for the track refugee.

'RS' doesn't appear on a 911 again until 1992, on the 964 gen car. With no aircon, no power steering, a roll cage, road skimming ride height and even the cabin courtesy light binned, it shed 120kg and gained a handful of horsepower. But the 'pay more, get less' equation and sheer harshness of the RS didn't add up. Reviews were vicious and sales stuttered. Naturally, a **964 RS** is now a £250k unicorn – about half as much as you'll pay for the 2.7 grandaddy.

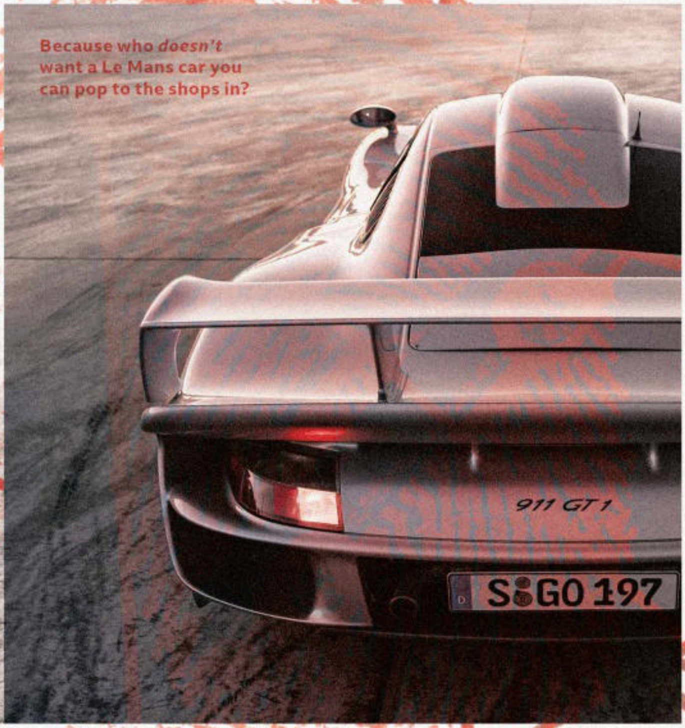
While Porsche was nursing burned fingers, the Italians decided to steal in. Surely, this would be the moment the lightened track special caught on and never looked back? The **Ferrari 348 Competizione** ought to have been the start of the Speciale dynasty, thanks to an almighty 200kg deletion brought on by a very early use of carbon panels. A fruitier exhaust squeezed an extra 10bhp from the 3.4-litre V8, but it felt like more with a shorter final drive unlocking zippier performance.

So why wasn't this the launch pad? Because while Ferrari got the recipe right, it cocked up the maths. Only 50 Comps were built, and the exotic panels meant the 348's asking price was more than the prettier new F355 which had already arrived to poop the party.

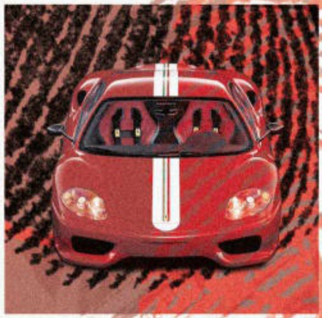
Around now there's a cul de sac in the potted history of the stripped 'n' ripped supercar: the road going Le Mans special. McLaren commemorates its sensational 1995 24-Hour Race win with five **F1 LMs**, while regulations force Porsche and Mercedes to sell road legal versions of their enormous endurance specials. Hence the outrageous **911 GT1 Straßenversion** and **CLK AMG GTR**. Sure, these are all circuit bred variants of road cars, but they're coming at the problem from the other direction: more road going competition cars than street supercars drizzled in motorsport dressing. Not to worry – the CLK's dominance killed GT1 racing and that was that.

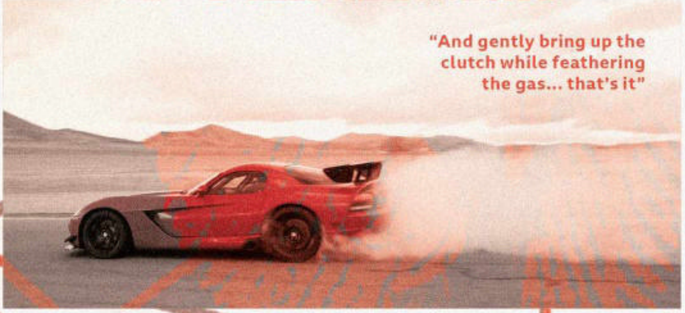
But 2003 is a monumental year. Ferrari and Porsche go head to head with respective special editions and two lineages of track day heroes are born. The 360 Modena morphs into the **Challenge Stradale**, while the 996 evolves into its final caged fighter form with the **911 GT3 RS**.

Porsche only sells its contender in white. Ferrari charges thousands for a white stripe. The 911 is manual only. Ferrari opts for F1 flappy paddles. But crucially, both find a willing audience who buy into the noise, the stiffness, the sweatiness and pain in the arse



Because who *doesn't* want a Le Mans car you can pop to the shops in?





"And gently bring up the clutch while feathering the gas... that's it"

BEN 230
YA06 BNF

harnesses. This is the moment that the modern track special is born – and plenty of other carmakers are watching with euro symbols in their eyes.

Not just supercar elites either. BMW spies the opportunity to play on its heritage and resurrects three iconic initials: the **E46 M3 CSL** is quite possibly peak M car. Infamously, the £58,000 CSL comes as standard with an automated manual gearbox and a polite disclaimer that its semi-slick Michelin tyres are a tad deathy in the wet.

Whatever was in the water at BMW around then trickled through to Mini, which beat the **Renault Megane R26.R** to the 'stripped track day hot hatch' idea by a couple of years with the 2006 **John Cooper Works GP**. Mini loses its way after the phenomenal GP2, but Renault's Trophy-Rs go from strength to lap record shattering strength. Sadly that lineage now appears dead in the water.

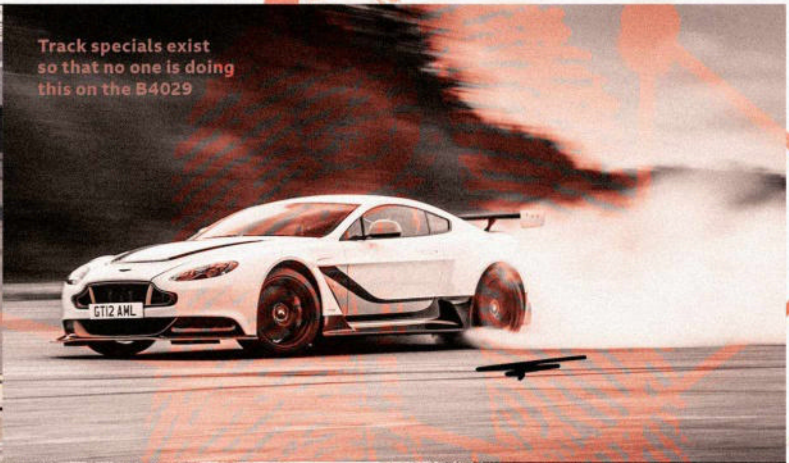
Meanwhile, 2007 heralds Lamborghini's literally titled **Gallardo Superleggera** while Mercedes' Black Series peaks too soon with the sublime **CLK63 Widebody** – another German super coupe sold with a 'careful now' grubby weather letter.

Until now a European preserve, America nails the brief first time with the **Dodge Viper ACR**, which becomes an unlikely lap record hero. It's a simple sum: 600bhp + 68kg of downforce – 36kg = big gains. Simpler times.

Right around here the global financial meltdown could stall the fun. Luckily for us the carmakers push the boundaries off the edge of the map: Ferrari lavishes the treatment over a front-engined V12 for the first time to create the controversially named but wonderfully savage **599 GTO**.

Then Bugatti proves even the world's fastest car needs more power, less weight, stickier tyres and redrawn aero, even if the

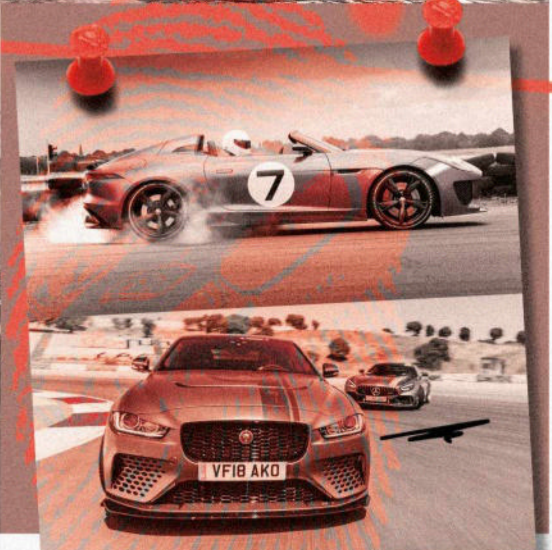
THE GERMANS INVENT BUSINESS CASUAL DRIVING



Track specials exist so that no one is doing this on the B4029

PIRELLI
Mobil 1

Mc675: best use of 'LT' initials since the bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich



FOR TRACK DAYS ON
THE DEEP FOREST RACEWAY

“WE DIDN’T KNOW WE’D PASSED PEAK TRACK SPECIAL”

267mph **Veyron Super Sport** is a long way off what you’d deem a ‘track car.’

Not long after Porsche runs out of 911s to diet and sets about its mid-engined twins with the suede to create the **Boxster Spyder** and **Cayman R**. Then another niche within a niche spawns – the track only hypercar. We’re given the **McLaren P1 GTR**, and the LaFerrari becomes the **FXXK**.

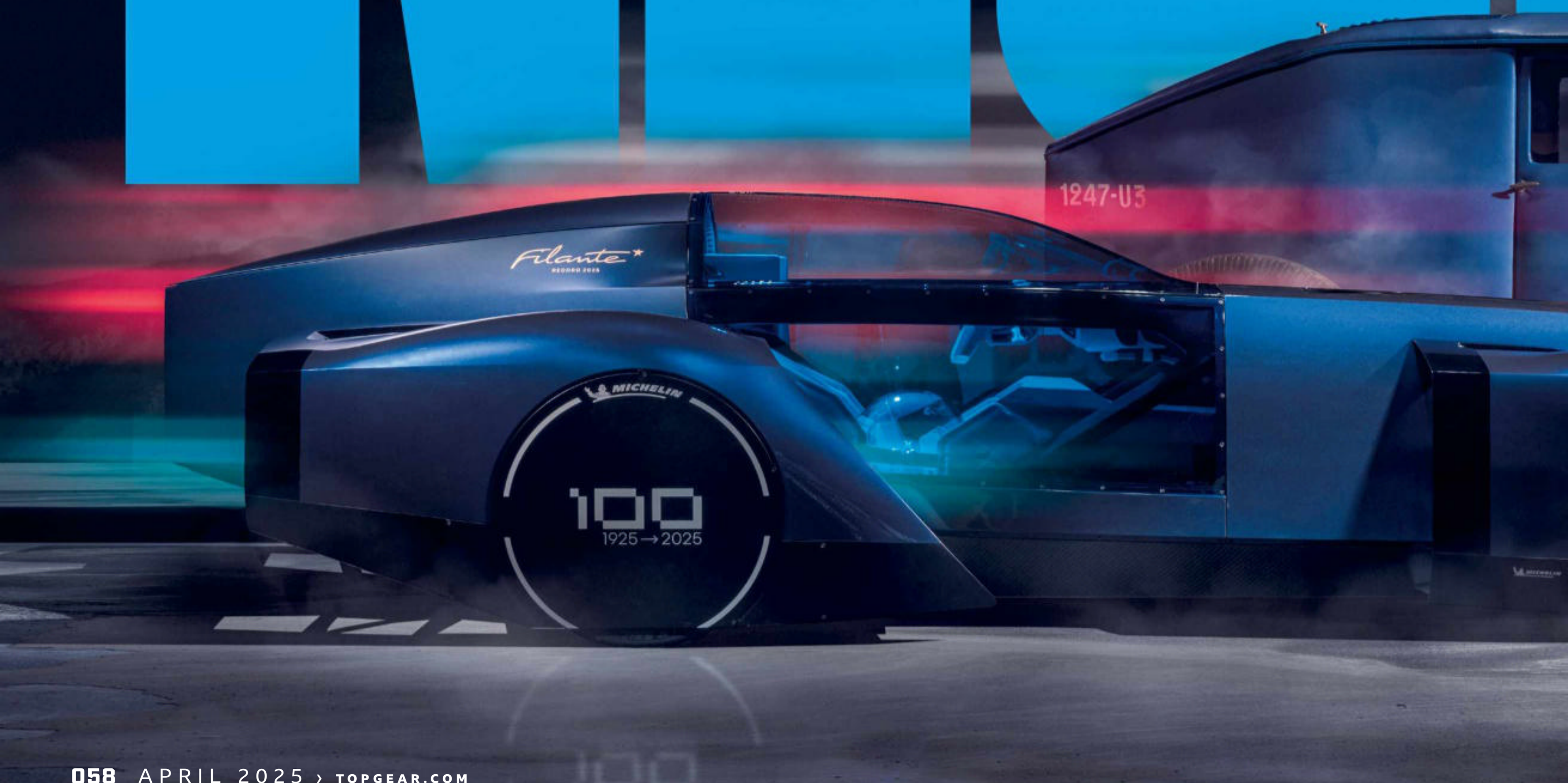
But the core business of absurd evolutions of already fast cars is still booming. Nissan flies the Japanese flag long since waved by the **NSX Type R** and its gramme shaving gearshift gaiter by setting internet forums alight with the **GT-R Nismo N Attack**. Nissan says it’s ‘road legal’ for its Nürburgring lap record, others are less convinced. Life’s too short to worry about that. The British are coming…

And cor blimey guv’nor do we mean business. In a dash over 12 months Aston Martin churns out not one but two winged monsters: the **Vantage GT12** and **GT8**. Our ears are still ringing. McLaren’s first foray into longtail territory results in the superb **675LT**, and Jaguar’s Special Vehicle Operations skunkworks smears D-type cool over the F-Type-ish **Project 7**. Somewhat forgotten now, but soon to boom in value (alongside the **Project 8**) as the last hurrah of ye olde muscle car Jag?

We didn’t know it then, but that might’ve been peak track special. What chance another ‘Project’ from Jaguar, or a ’Ringmeister Megane now Renault’s hatch is an e-crossover? Cars continue to balloon in size and weight: the current M4 ‘CSL’ is actually heavier than the bog standard full fat M4 it replaced. And thanks to the insta shove of the electric motor, if you want to make a car go quicker, it’s a heck of a lot cheaper and easier to add power than subtract mass, before waving anything in the direction of a six point fertility smooshing harness.

So, we end up back where it all began. Porsche’s GT division was never quite satisfied with the 2016 **911 R**, so boss Andreas Preuninger revisited the concept for the 911’s 60th birthday and built the GOAT: the even lighter (but strictly not for tracks) **911 S/T**. Company founder Ferry Porsche once said “the last car built on Earth will surely be a sports car”. And most likely, it’ll have stripes, stickers, arse crushing seats and magnesium wheel nuts. Long live the light(er)weights.

REC


1247-U3
Filante
RECORD 2025
MICHELIN
100
1925→2025

ORD SCRATCH

Renault wants to break EV efficiency world records, to do so it's taking lessons from the past...

WORDS GREG POTTS **PHOTOGRAPHY** JOHN WYCHERLEY

THIS IS AS FAR FROM A RUN OF THE MILL CLIO AS YOU COULD POSSIBLY GET.

In fact, looking like a cross between the Michael Keaton era Batmobile and a *Star Wars* pod racer, the Renault Filante Record 2025 is described by its maker as "a laboratory on wheels for testing new technologies, materials and innovations".

The Filante Record 2025 won't just be a rolling lab though, because as the name suggests Renault is planning to use this outrageous looking single seater to break world records for "power consumption and range with an 87kWh battery". Yep, it's electric. First attempts will take place in the first half of this year.

Renault says that it has "always seen motorsports and records as a way to validate its innovations, before applying them to production models" and so this particular concept car is heavily inspired by radical record setting Renaults from the past.

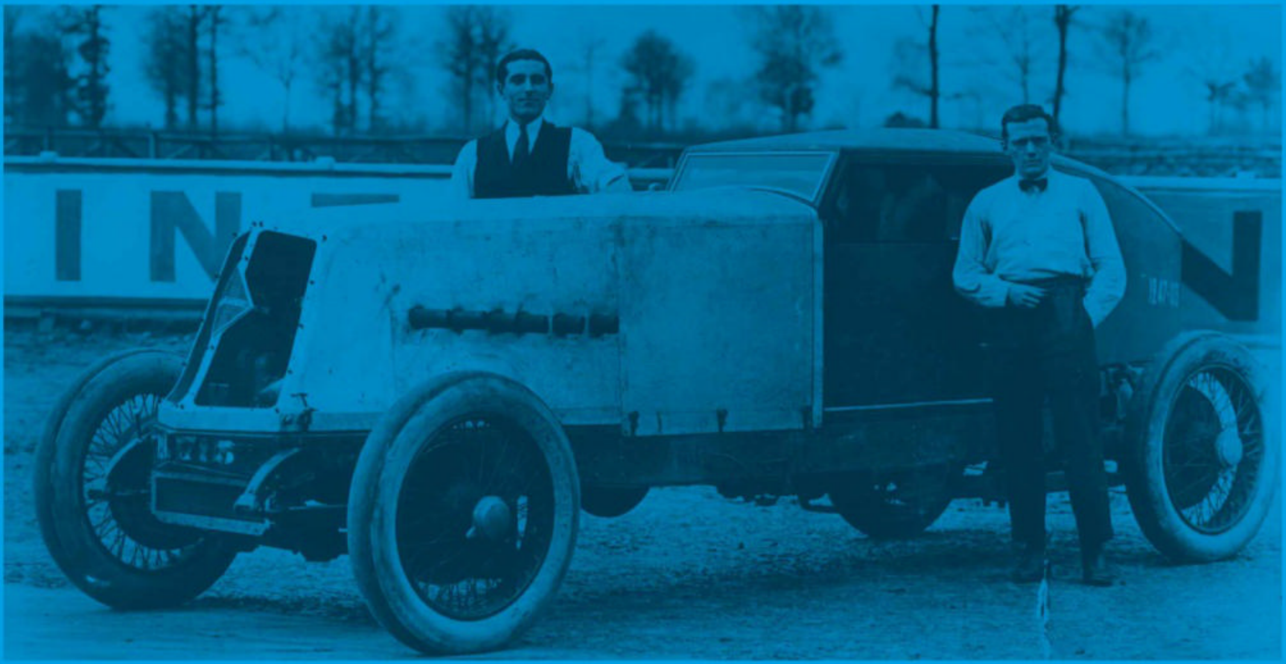
Time for a quick history lesson. Back in the roaring 1920s speed records were all the rage, and Renault wanted its largest luxury car – the 40 CV – to take a piece of the pioneering pie. However, even with its new 140bhp, 9.1-litre straight six engine and a special sleek(ish) narrow body designed by engineers Ellery Garfield and Robert Plessier, Renault knew that it couldn't compete for the outright land speed record, which for years was traded between bonkers Brits Malcolm Campbell, Henry Seagrave and JG Parry-Thomas in aircraft engined creations. So, the French firm decided that the newly christened 40 CV des Records should focus on endurance and average speed.

On 11 May 1925, Garfield and Plessier drove an open topped Type ML version of the 40 CV des Records on the oval at Montlhéry, setting new records for average speed over three hours, average speed over 500km and average speed over 500 miles. It was the modified, tin topped Type NM that gave the car its greatest record though. In July 1926, Garfield and Plessier returned to Montlhéry with a 14-strong pitcrew and an additional driver – Paul Guillon – and set a record for distance driven in a 24 hour period. That was 4,167.578km at an average speed of 173.649kph [107.900mph]. Oh, and by this point they had ditched the front brakes to save weight.

The Étoile Filante (or 'Shooting Star') which lends part of its name to this new car was no less dramatic. With a super streamlined look, polyester bodywork and a 270bhp jet engine

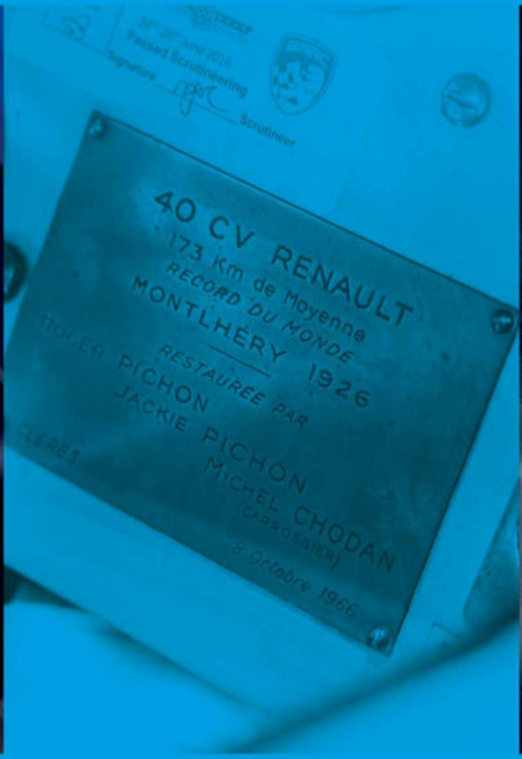
Filante
RECORD 2025
MICHELIN
RC 40

Below: engineers Ellery Garfield and Robert Plessier with the 40 CV record car. Above: the modern interpretation that looks only very vaguely like the original, but has the same high hopes



“WITH THE NEW 5 ON SALE, AND THE 4 AND TWINGO COMING, RENAULT IS ON A RETRO ROLL”

“And to stop, you simply take your foot off the throttle and wait four miles to slow down”


Passed Scrutineering
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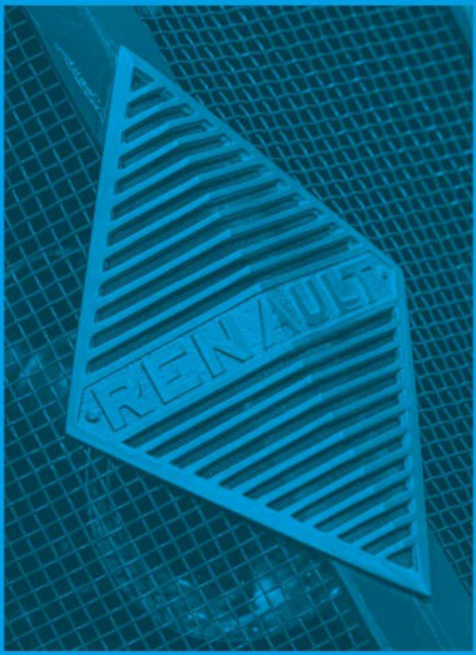
40 CV RENAULT
173 Km de Moyenne
RECORD DU MONDE
MONTLHÉRY 1926
RESTAURÉE PAR
ROGER PICHON
JACKIE PICHON
MICHEL CHODAN
(CARROSSIER)
CLÈRES
5 octobre 1966

40 CV des Records – we have Ray-Bans with more forward facing glass

Filante
RECORD 2025
MICHELIN
100
1925→2025

Looks as slippery in reverse as it does going forwards – just a suggestion

Daft Punk have already been on the phone asking if they can have a couple of these



just by the driver's head, it set four records at the Bonneville Salt Flats in late 1956 by clocking 306.9kph [190.7mph] over one kilometre, 308.9kph [191.9mph] over five kilometres, 307.7kph [191.2mph] over one mile and 280.8kph [174.5mph] over five miles. So yeah, Renault has previous in this game.

"We came up with an idea in the design team to do a homage to the 40 CV des Records on its 100th birthday," says Sandeep Bhambra, director of advanced design for Renault.

"Of course, we wanted to do a stylistic homage, but beyond that we thought about setting some records in the electric era because these endurance records are super relevant today, especially when a lot of people are still suffering with range anxiety on electric cars. We wanted to see how far we could push the envelope with current EV technology and some new developments."

After just a year of work and collaborations with engineering and aero departments, plus plenty of input from prototype racecar builder Ligier Automotive, what you see here is essentially a blend of the 40 CV des Records and the Étoile Filante, but brought kicking and silently screaming into the 21st century. With the new 5 on sale and the 4 and Twingo still to come, Renault is on a bit of a retro design roll right now.

"The main silhouette of the Filante Record 2025, the side view of the car, is inspired by the 40 CV des Records," says Bhambra. "But that makes sense, this part of the car was very aerodynamically efficient. The fenders are more inspired by the Étoile Filante. Why is that? Because we know today that open wheeled cars are too aerodynamically punishing. So, this car sits between the two in terms of inspiration for us."

We must talk aerodynamics. With wind tunnel tests still to take place, Renault hasn't provided official figures yet, but it's aiming for an ultra slippery drag coefficient of somewhere between 0.20 and 0.25. There's not much of a front end to punch through the air either, so the overall drag should be pretty minimal. Good news for range.

Does that mean that 100 years ago, Garfield and Plessier were right to hammer the 40 CV des Records into that squished shape with its dramatic pinched tail?

"Yes, they were correct in the 1920s," says Bhambra. Although he goes on to explain that, for it to be even more aero efficient, the tail had to be extended even further on the new car with bodywork that sweeps back at a more gentle angle.

"In aerodynamics of cars, normally you hear about 16 or 17 degree angles of approach. Here we are trying to achieve eight to 13. It's about allowing the air to go gently to the point at the end.

"That's what we've tried to correct from the 40 CV, but it's a big constraint because if you start from that point at the rear and then draw lines forward at those angles, it doesn't give you much space to put a person in the middle."

> "THE SEATING POSITION IS REMINISCENT OF AN F1 CAR'S"

The Filante Record 2025 actually looks surprisingly small in the metal too. At 5.12m long it's only a tad shorter than a Mercedes S-Class – good for controlling airflow around the car – but even with its wheels separated from the body it's only 1.71m wide. Plus, it's only 1.19m tall and weighs under 1,000kg. We'll come back to the latter.

First, the cockpit. We can legitimately call it that because it's supposed to look like it has been pinched directly from a fighter jet or spaceship, while the exposed screws on the bodywork are apparently inspired by aircraft construction techniques. The seating position is reminiscent of an F1 car's, but that's so the stacked batteries can be housed under the driver's feet, and the seat itself is made from stretched canvas supported by thin carbon fibre blades. Renault says it is "similar in style to a hammock". Sounds wonderfully comfortable. Something to look out for on the next generation Clio, perhaps.

The driver won't accelerate or brake in the usual manner either, because rather than pedals, all controls are operated by hand using the games console style triggers on the back of the yoke. That's made possible through the use of steer by wire and drive by wire systems, and it is genuinely something that Renault could put into production.

"We had to use steer by wire on this car, because there's no way of having a steering column and a battery pack up front, so it was a good idea for packaging, but also for saving weight," said Bhambra. "We also lighten the car because with hand controls we don't have the pedal structure around the feet. It liberates a lot of space in the interior. It's something that we are looking at and exploring for future cars, but it's not that easy to put something so innovative in a production car so quickly."

At the centre of Filante Record 2025's yoke is also something that could apparently make production – a thin flexible screen that has been wrapped around a cylinder and displays speed, range and other key info. Even the ventilation system has been specially designed to use as few parts as possible, meaning it draws less power from the battery and saves weight.

There has been an obsession with weight saving that makes us hopeful for lighter production EVs. The Filante Record 2025 uses a tubular chassis that's mostly made from carbon and aluminium in the middle, while the front and rear subframes are steel but developed by Ligier to be as light as possible. The body is full carbon fibre and half as thick as the stuff usually used on concept cars.

Renault has also 3D printed complex parts using Scalmalloy – a high strength aluminium alloy. Oh, and it says it deployed 'topology optimisation' in order to reduce the amount of material used in areas that aren't under specific mechanical stress. Apparently, this significantly reduced the overall weight.

That one tonne kerbweight sounds even more impressive when you learn that – despite new carbon fibre casing and a technique that sees the cells integrated directly into the battery pack without intermediate modules – the rehashed, Scenic sourced 87kWh battery and all of the accompanying electrical components weigh 600kg on their own. There's no word on what motor is powering the potential record setter, but Renault has confirmed that it's rear mounted and thus rear wheel drive. There are also special slimline 19-inch Michelin tyres to lower the rolling resistance, and Renault wants to pull together a team of drivers for the long distance record runs. The only catch? Each driver will need to weigh less than 50kg so that Renault can hit its strict weight targets. We'll just pop our CVs away for now, then...

SLIPPERY

SLOPE

The British ski team needed a ride to Kitzbühel… we had just the car for the job

WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE
PHOTOGRAPHY ROWAN HORNCASTLE

Kitzbühel is pumping. Heaving. It hums and vibrates, shimmers with life and energy in a way that's entirely explained by the 100,000 people who have crammed themselves into this small medieval Tyrolean town (usual population 8,300).

Frosted breath steams into the chilled air as the crowds cheer and chant, cowbells swing frantically, Europop blares, beer sloshes, flares and flags wave erratically and bratwurst is consumed.

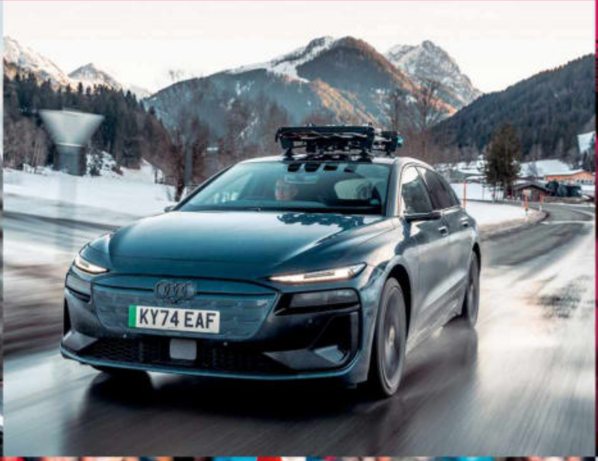
This is the Hahnenkammrennen, the most famous weekend on the Alpine calendar, the jewel in Austria's ski racing crown, and all the excuse necessary for an almighty party. The stumbling and unsteadiness has nothing to do with the snow and ice underfoot. For many here the ski racing is entirely incidental.

But not for me. It's rapidly approaching 6pm on Saturday evening, I've got British slalom skiers Laurie Taylor and Billy Major in the car and we're stuck in traffic. This is bad. They need to be at the bib draw that sorts the start order for tomorrow's race, I've got the right pass which eases us past the police, but cuts no ice with the crowds. We proceed at stumbling pace. If I had an engine, I'd rev it.

The Audi A6 Avant e-tron is our sort of electric car. By which I mean it's not an SUV. How refreshing. It's the most aerodynamic Audi there's ever been, slipperier through the air than a ski gliding over snow. And zero emissions means we're not causing the snow to melt – a literal hot topic in these parts. So how to put it to the test? Simple: give it the most challenging scenario a practically minded electric car will ever face. Fill it with kit (bad for range). Stick stuff on the roof (bad for range). Drive it across Germany at autobahn pace (bad for range). Go somewhere very cold (bad for range).

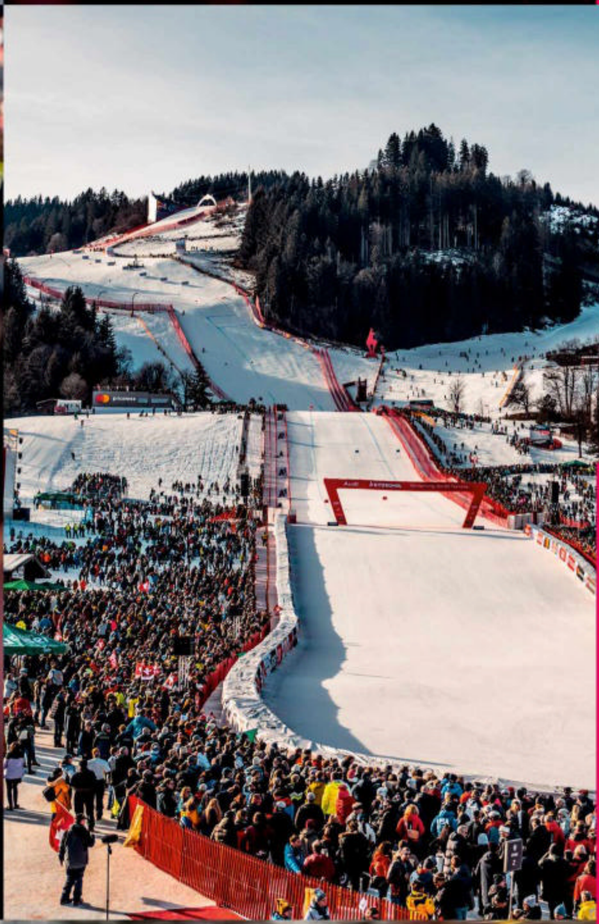
I was happy with all of that, apart from the sticking stuff on the roof. I imagined the looks on the faces of Audi's aerodynamicists, ruining untold hours of wind tunnel work, and shoved it all inside for the journey over. Research suggests that I boosted range (and lowered cost) by around 10–15 per cent as a result. And you know what? For a long high-speed trip the Audi is the most efficient electric car that I've driven. In similar conditions electric SUVs I've tested have struggled to do much over 2.0 miles per kWh, but over the course of 1,789 chilly trans European miles the A6 did 2.7mpkWh.

Let's step away from the real world and into the lab to compare it with Audi's own Q6 e-tron, which is technically identical to this and only weighs 15kg more than the 2,185kg estate. But instead of a 0.24 drag factor, it's 0.30Cd, and that's for a shape that already has a 10 per cent bigger frontal area. Its official range is 361 miles, against 402 for the



0 mph
80 %
202 mi

Professional downhill skiing – even the fans are finely tuned athletes



Top tip: leave humans attached to skis on roof for rapid ascents

Avant. Which of course it doesn't do if you're going at 100mph through Germany and it's sub-zero outside. I'm happy with 240 miles. Charging is wickedly fast thanks to 800V architecture, the camera mirrors stay clean, and because it was developed round these parts it's silent through the air and rides far better here than it did in the UK, where it felt a little lumpen and buzzed on concrete surfaces like someone was gently blowing a kazoo in your ear.

But I get on well with it. Yes, the colour palette is dismally sludgy and the deep sides that conceal the battery make it look heavier of flank than a lithe estate should, but life on board is good. The cabin design provides space and shape while also finding room for five screens across the dash, the augmented reality head up display works well, it's not too complex or distracting to operate, there's a fun panoramic roof with switchable transparency and it's every bit as big inside as an SUV.

And handles better. Sitting lower you're less exposed to suspension turbulence, body control and lean are more restrained, it's not having to work hard to keep control of itself, so it glides about easily, shrinking distance, being effortless. Just one thing. It's not quattro. Gasp, etc. This is a RWD Audi estate. Not for BMW chasing reasons, but for single motor efficiency. You can have quattro for low temp peace of mind, but winter tyres do the job better and don't cost £5,100 extra.

Define irony: a pastime steeped in wealth and exclusivity, whose pinnacle crams six people and gear into borrowed vans and sends them round the Alps like rock band roadies. That's ski racing. There's no glamour and little money. Team GB's Alpine ski squad consists of three racers (including Dave Ryding, the UK's most successful ski racer ever) and three coaches – who also double up as physios, course inspectors, drivers, managers and ski technicians. All ex-racers. Passion has a lot to do with why everyone is involved.

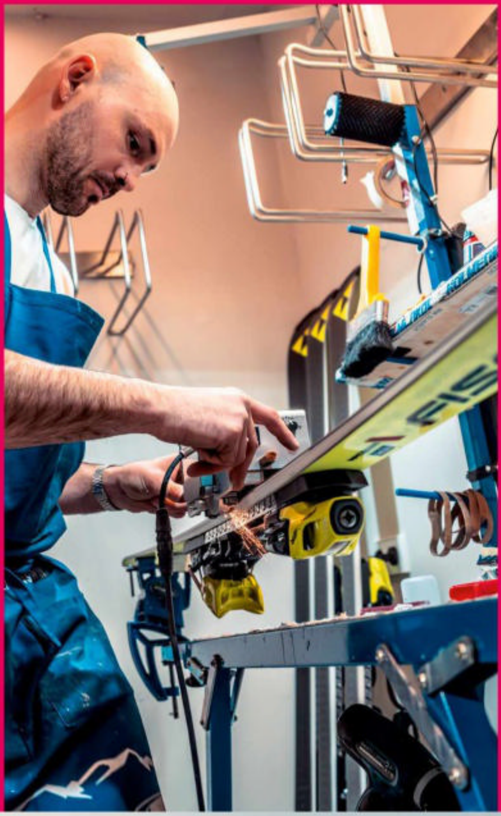
A few miles up the valley a low flying Red Bull aerobatics plane signals the start of the men's downhill, but I'm in a hotel basement with Tom 'TJ' Baldwin and head coach Alain Baxter, prepping skis for tomorrow's slalom. It's fascinating. At its most basic a ski is a leaf spring, designed to flex under pressure on the way into corners, and then release its energy at the exit. It's wider at tip and tail so it curves into a radius when canted over on its edge. Like a GT3 racer, although cosmetically similar to models you or I could buy, the construction is entirely different. I pick up a pair of Laurie Taylor's race skis. They're dense and heavy. The EVs of the ski world. Necessary for stability and torsional strength, apparently.

SWISSPEAK RESORTS
A1
3
HEAD
LEKI
GB
fusalp

Either he's done well in the race or just been told the new issue of *TopGear* magazine is out...

Preparation is everything – it's akin to setting up a racing car. Although a ski only spends around three per cent of a run on its base during a slalom, using the right wax to minimise friction is key. But it's the metal edges that the attention really goes into. Sharpness and tuning is everything when the courses are injected with water to form sheet ice: "We sharpen them at 88°," comments TJ as sparks fly from his £3k edge grinder, "then finish them with a hand file. I use a sensitive bit of my hand to check the sharpness." Scars line the outside edge of his little finger. "The boys are so sensitive, a microscopic nick in the edge and they'll tell because it'll change the grip. Confidence is vital – they need to trust the edge from the moment they push out of the starting gate."

I end up having to turf Billy and Laurie out of the A6 to get them to the bib draw on time – that in itself draws a crowd. The next day conditions aren't exactly... snowy. It pounds with rain. I hear people mutter and jest about global warming as the slalomists flick flack down, but not even a downpour can derail the party atmosphere. Ryding and Taylor finish joint 16th. For a team with so little resource, that's a reasonable result, but three years ago Ryding won outright here, the first Brit ever to win a Ski World Cup race.



The A6 e-tron glides silently around Kitzbühel, carrying skis and skiers, the ideal zero emission partner for a sport whose very existence is dependent on a natural product that appears to be in increasingly short supply. Intelligently designed, slippery and efficient, the hope for us is that it could kickstart an estate car revival. Long shot? Yeah, but so was a Brit winning a ski race.

Sorry lads – it's rock, paper, scissors to decide who's going to have to walk back

'THERE'S NO GLAMOUR AND LITTLE MONEY IN SKI RACING'

SHOW

Lasers! Pyros! Capacity crowds! Take That! Oh, and some Formula

WORDS SAM PHILIP **PHOTOGRAPHY** HUCK MOUNTAIN

Libertex
SINGHA
PIRELLI
P ZERO

TIME!

One cars too. What really happened at F1's stadium launch party?

A Haas car revolves slowly on a dolly.
The crowd goes wild!

A wild gyrating DJ pretends to twiddle some knobs.
The crowd goes wild!

Lando Norris flicks his hair.
The crowd goes wild!

Max Verstappen waves politely.
The crowd boos.

Welcome to F1 75...

"What is F1 75?" asked reigning world champion Max Verstappen when, ahead of the O2 launch event, he was asked if he was looking forward to it. "What are you talking about?"

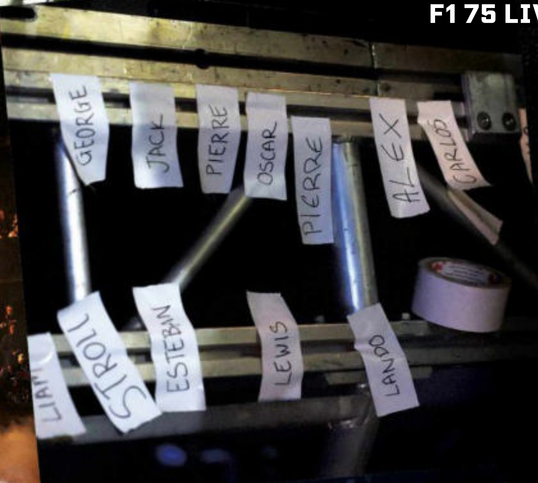
Provided with a vague précis, Verstappen audibly groaned. "I don't watch any F1," he replied. "I hope I'm sick that week."

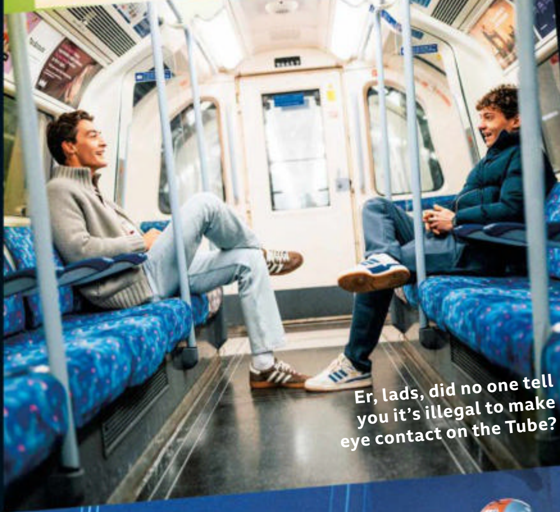
Max's sicknote wish, as it transpires, isn't granted. Or if he *is* ill, he's been given a double dose of Anadin Extra and told to get his Nomex clad arse down to the O2. Verstappen's pre-event hesitancy might partly explain the crowd booing every time he appears on screen (the rest, I think, is explained by 'being Max Verstappen'). But, give the dice headed speedster his due, it's a fair question. What *is* F1 75? What *are* you talking about?

Call it the event the world never realised it needed. For 74 F1 seasons before 2025, livery reveals weren't considered a big deal. Teams would unveil their new car a few weeks before the new season, trot out a few quotes about pushing the boundaries for the upcoming season, then dash back to the wind tunnel to figure out how to make their car actually work. The paintjob itself rarely made headlines, because it generally looked much the same as the old one. By the time you've squeezed in all the sponsors' logos, and kept a strong visual link to last year's car – because at the Visa Cash App Racing Bulls Formula One team, brand loyalty is all – there's not much real estate left to work with. Livery surprises have historically been rare to nonexistent.

This is fine. No one wants Man City rocking up at the start of 2025/26 season in black and white stripes, and Liverpool sporting royal blue. Same with F1 cars. Ferraris are red, Mercs are silvery, Saubers are... yeah I'll get back to you on that one. Unremarkable consistency is what we need. This is why even the rapacious Premier League has never made every team unveil its new season kit at a grand stadium gig in mid July. (Harry Maguire, standing stock still under a silk sheet, patiently waiting to model Man United's new match day training top.) But for F1's 75th birthday, a coordinated big stage livery reveal was what F1 decided was required.

So how do you turn 'removing the sheets from 10 broadly unchanged cars' into a two hour stadium show? If you're F1 75, with an enormous amount of light, an enormous amount of noise, and very little reference to the cars themselves. The event features performances from Take That, who, disappointingly, fail to treat the audience to a rendition of 'It only takes a minute (to complete a lap of the Austrian Grand Prix circuit, give or take five seconds)', along with Machine Gun Kelly, Kane Brown, Handsy Williams and Brian Tyler, one of whom I may have made up. Jack Whitehall hosts, and does a joke about F1 cars' bootspace. There are many lasers and several controlled explosions. By the end of the 120 minute sensory assault, my ears throb, and I seem to have lost the ability to see in colour.


GEORGE
JACK
PIERRE
OSCAR
PIERRE
ALEX
CARLOS
LIAM
STROLL
ESTEBAN
LEWIS
LANDO



Er, lads, did no one tell you it's illegal to make eye contact on the Tube?

Both Racing Bulls drivers had permission to be up past their bed times

Everyone's thrilled to be at the *Drive to Survive* live recording. What's F1?

It's been three months, turns out that *isn't* helmet hair

The haunted look of a man who's done launch season 22 times already

Between the Take That-ing and the Machine Gun Kelly-ing, each team is given some seven minutes to introduce its car. In every case, most of this time is taken up by playing in a hyper polished, heavily produced film, most invoking vague notions of GOING FURTHER, FASTER or EMBRACING THE RACE or SHAKING UP THE ESTABLISHMENT. No event has ever felt less like it wishes to shake up the establishment.

Chat with the drivers is kept to an absolute minimum. With respect, this seems prudent. When it comes to holding a crowd, Yuki Tsunoda cannot hope to compete with Gary Barlow in full flow. Around a racetrack, I suspect the tables would be turned. Verstappen isn't permitted to speak at all, which seems to suit all concerned.

The liveries' grand reveals receive even less air time than the drivers. This may be because they're not grand reveals at all:

"TSUNODA CANNOT HOPE TO COMPETE WITH GARY BARLOW IN FULL FLOW"

PHOTOS: HUCK MOUNTAIN, MANUFACTURER, GETTY

many teams have already conducted private, embargoed unveilings beforehand. A few hours before the big O2 event, I'm on the other side of London, watching Pierre Gasly and Jack Doohan remove a large sheet from their only slightly smaller A525 racer. Gasly confidently announces he's "getting stronger, month after month", raising the terrifying possibility that by the end of the 2025 season he'll be a ball of pure muscle the size of a small skyscraper, devouring the other drivers one by one. Flavio Briatore complains about how pink the car is. Doohan declares himself totally chilled about striding down the catwalk in front of a packed O2. "We're in the entertainment industry," he grins. "You can't control the unknowns."

Oh, but you can. F1 75 is all about controlling the unknowns. The O2 event is scripted and stage managed to the final millisecond and micrometre. Nothing is left to chance. This is corporate budget Insta content expanded to a stadium sized spectacle, elite sport with every rough edge sanded off. As an exercise in logistics, it's jaw dropping. As a medium for conveying the excitement of circuit racing, less so. F1 cars, after all, are made to go fast. Literally the only thing they're good at doing. An event in which not a single one moves under its own steam is, to put it politely, a different thing.

F1 75 seems to leave car folk broadly unimpressed. The reaction from the *TopGear* editorial team, watching the YouTube live stream, spans the gamut from 'cringe' to 'total cringe'. It's a broadly similar response across the motorsport media. Behind the decibels and the lasers and the extraordinary production values, it's tough to shake the sensation F1 75 contains no substance of any kind. Colours! Shapes! Soundbites! Luminous, explosive, noisy candyfloss.

However. It's easy to mock F1 75, which is why I've just spent 1,000 words doing just that. But despite tickets ranging from £55 to

AT&T
Mobil
ORACLE
Red Bull
PIRELLI
P ZERO
Hard Rock

For £50m, Max will do a half decent job at pretending he wants to be here

ROKT
ORACLE
ARE WE DREAMING
WELCOME TO Fabulous LAS VEGAS NEVADA
Stake
F1 TEAM
KICK | SAUBER
MAADEN
ASTON MARTIN
aramco

Alpine's Disco Dave is also available for weddings and that

Aston unveils its new limited edition F1 car for the track, two have been sold already

£110, it sells out the O2. I suspect they could have filled it several times over. Whatever the hell it is, clearly there's a market for it.

And though the online reaction might be muted, inside the O2, the atmosphere is… rapturous. Quasi religious. The audience is far younger and less male than your traditional F1 crowd, almost exclusively engulfed in F1 branded clothing. (McLaren garb is most popular by a distance, followed by Ferrari and then Mercedes. I spot one teenager dressed head to toe in Stake F1 Team Sauber merch, who with the benefit of hindsight may actually have been Gabriel Bortoleto.)

And they're not here for the cars. Chatting to O2 attendees, every one, when I ask what they're looking forward to, mentions a favourite driver. Not a team, not Alpine's hotly anticipated new corporate tie up with Uruguayan commerce company Mercado Libre, not Take That's spirited rendition of 'Everything changes (in the F1 rulebook for the 2026 season)', but Lando, Carlos, George, Lewis. But mostly Lando. And definitely not Max.

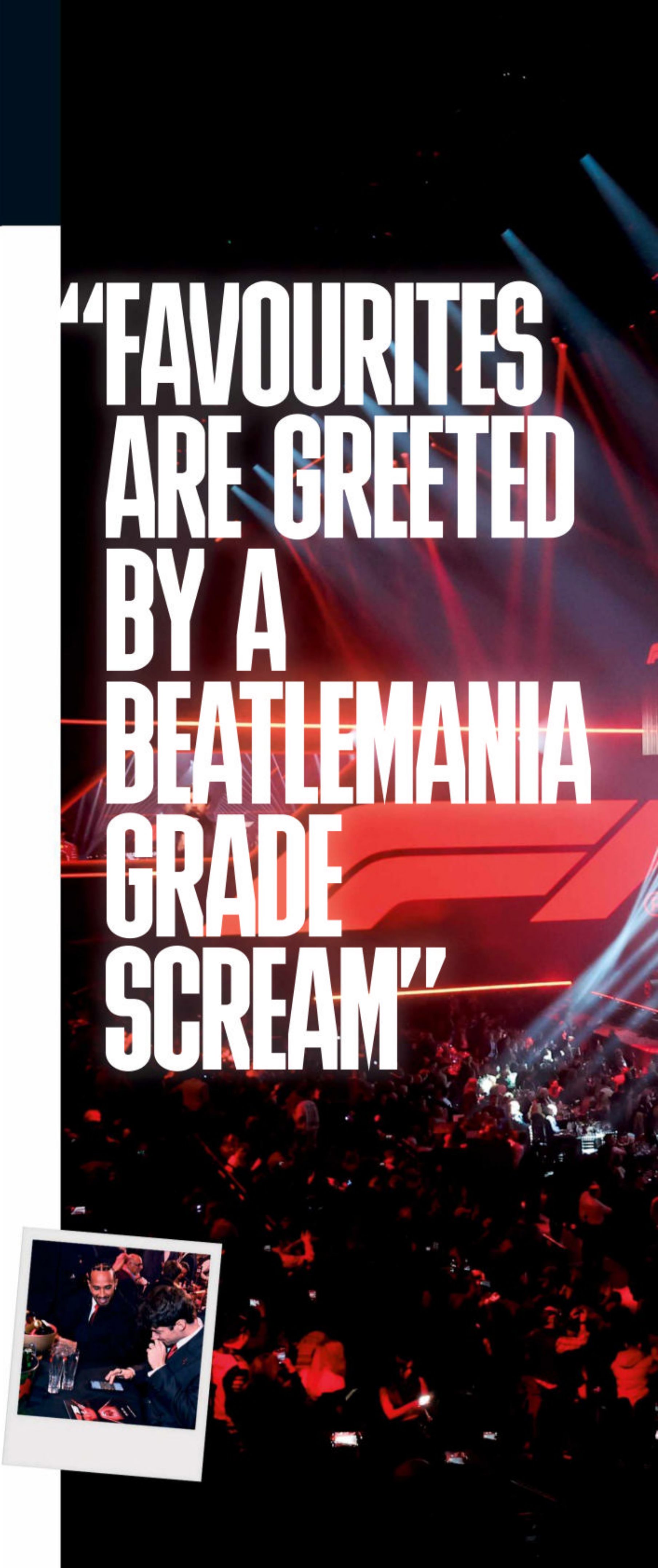
"I can't believe I'm going to *see* Charles," gushes Maddie, who's got a seat in the highest tier, fully 60 metres from the stage. He'll be quite small, I point out. "That's what I love about him," Maddie breathes. Every utterance of the crowd favourites, however banal (and they are all banal), is greeted by a Beatlemania grade scream. The *Drive to Survive* effect is real, and it's reached critical mass in the O2. A few punters clutch a beer or glass of wine, but most seem to be hopped up on the mere prospect of being within 75 metres of a tiny Italian teenager dressed in fireproof fabric.

Lance Armstrong's autobiography was titled *It's Not About the Bike*. He wasn't lying, because in Armstrong's case it was about the industrial quantities of drugs. But for the F1 75 audience, it's really not about the car. For this crowd, the F1 product (for we must call it that) seems all about the driver: the rotating cast of characters and their soap opera relationships.

I mean, I'd contend that, if you're into soap operas, there are juicier offerings out there than a bunch of polite, media trained young men who occasionally suffer minor sporting disagreements. But then again, no *Neighbours* cast member has ever punted another *Neighbours* cast member into a barrier at 200mph, so maybe I'm on the wrong side of this argument.

And, most of all, what's the harm of it? Personally I'd rather tear out my own circulatory system than witness another moment of Lance Stroll and Fernando Alonso's 007 pastiche, but if Maddie wants to spend her cash watching a seven stone Gen Zer struggle to use a microphone, more power to her. If this is the tribe you've found, the content that makes you happy, knock yourself out. Capitalism has always found new ways of liberating punters of their cash, and at least this one's not hurting anyone (apart from Christian Horner, who clearly wants to be F1's hero rather than the villain role he's been ascribed, and I think we can all live with that).

Maybe the antipathy towards *Strictly Come DRSing* is because it feels a distraction from the pure sporting endeavour of F1. But let's be honest. F1 has never been about pure sporting endeavour. It's always been a telenovela, an industrial complex generating drama and infights and hissy fits. F1 75 is simply its logical conclusion. At least, let's pray it's the conclusion. Otherwise get ready for January 2026's sellout Big F1 Driver Cockpit Fitting super gig at Wembley stadium…



"FAVOURITES ARE GREETED BY A BEATLEMANIA GRADE SCREAM"

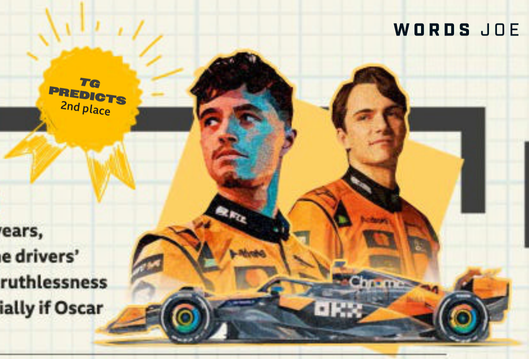
The 20 fastest men in the world will shortly race out the back door to their hotels

THE GRID

Six rookies, much musical chairs and some new bloke at Ferrari… here are your 2025 runners and riders

WORDS JOE HOLDING

01



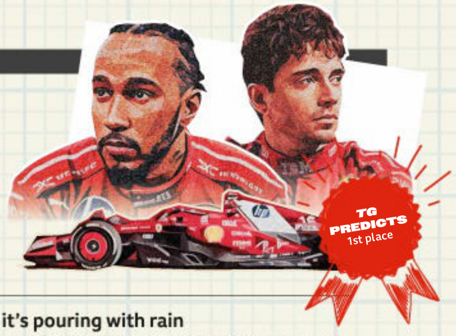
McLAREN

LANDO NORRIS GBR [4] **OSCAR PIASTRI** AUS [81]

Fresh off the back of a first constructors' title in 26 years, McLaren's goal is simple: repeat the trick, but win the drivers' crown too. Max taught Lando some harsh lessons in ruthlessness last year. He'll need to put them into practice, especially if Oscar turns the wick up again.

SUCCESS IS… giving Zak Brown another reason to visit the tattoo parlour
FAILURE IS… running out of ideas when flexi wings are banned

02



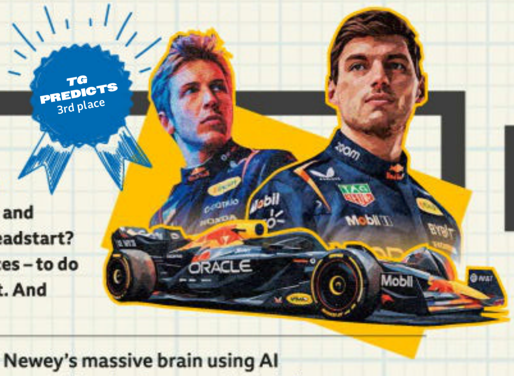
FERRARI

CHARLES LECLERC MON [16] **LEWIS HAMILTON** GBR [44]

Ferrari *just* missed out on glory last season, so if hiring the most successful driver in F1 history doesn't work… what will? With two bona fide megastars in the garage there's literally no excuse this time. Unless the intern's left in charge of strategy again. Which could very well happen.

SUCCESS IS… not pitting for slicks when it's pouring with rain
FAILURE IS… anything less than first place with the most expensive pairing ever

03



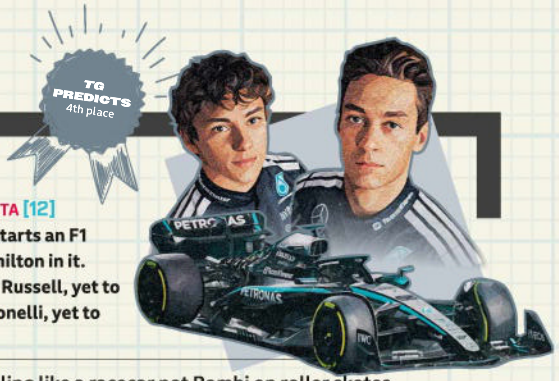
RED BULL RACING

MAX VERSTAPPEN NED [1] **LIAM LAWSON** NZL [30]

Max Verstappen ended 2024 with the third fastest car, and *still* won title #4. Easily. Can he do it again without a headstart? Hmm. He'll need Liam Lawson – a veteran of only 11 races – to do a better job than the last guy. And the chap before that. And the bloke before him…

SUCCESS IS… recreating Adrian Newey's massive brain using AI
FAILURE IS… crushing yet another promising junior career in its infancy

04



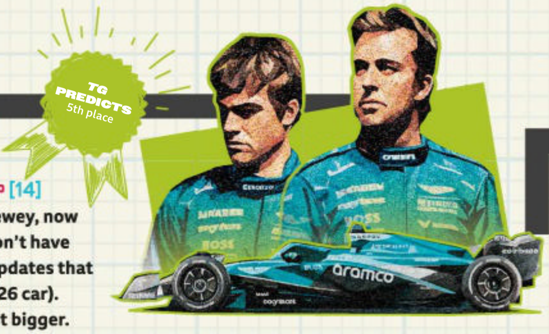
MERCEDES

GEORGE RUSSELL GBR [63] **KIMI ANTONELLI** ITA [12]

For the first time ever, the works Mercedes team starts an F1 season without one of Fangio, Schumacher or Hamilton in it. Wow. Picking up the mantle of history are George Russell, yet to sample a championship capable car, and Kimi Antonelli, yet to sample a beard.

SUCCESS IS… the W16 handling like a racecar not Bambi on roller skates
FAILURE IS… cracking ground effect the moment F1 shelves it

05



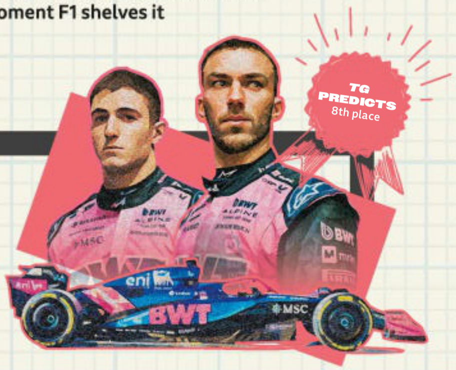
ASTON MARTIN

LANCE STROLL CAN [18] **FERNANDO ALONSO** ESP [14]

Aston stunned the F1 multiverse by hiring Adrian Newey, now a fully paid up employee as of March. The AMR25 won't have his fingerprints on it yet, so watch out for the aero updates that follow (though he says he's really working on the 2026 car). Witness the lap times tumble… and 'Nando's grin get bigger.

SUCCESS IS… making a car fast enough to flatter the boss's son
FAILURE IS… pleading with F1's design GOAT not to do a Valkyrie v2

06



ALPINE

PIERRE GASLY FRA [10] **JACK DOOHAN** AUS [7]

Flavio Briatore gave Jack Doohan an early debut in Abu Dhabi, and a month later he paid off Williams to hire Franco Colapinto as Alpine's backup driver. Does this project confidence in the Aussie? No. Will this soothe a team still reeling from the demise of its engine programme? Also no.

SUCCESS IS… going the whole year without sacking the team principal
FAILURE IS… not making enough headlines to help flog the A290

07

TG PREDICTS 6th place

HAAS

ESTEBAN OCON FRA [31] **OLIVER BEARMAN** GBR [87]

Haas punched above its weight last season, as it does every year it doesn't finish stone dead last. Ocon is a known entity but 19 year old Bearman is a gamble. He did alright as a Ferrari super sub though, remember? If the design team can keep up, he might be 2025's breakout star.

SUCCESS IS... finally getting that first podium after 10 years
FAILURE IS... losing all of its American fans to Cadillac

08

TG PREDICTS 9th place

RACING BULLS

YUKI TSUNODA JPN [22] **ISACK HADJAR** FRA [6]

What's the point of the Red Bull junior squad these days? Every graduate since Verstappen has been chewed up and spat out by the mothership. Tsunoda still hasn't had that, er, privilege, and Hadjar, 20, is next up. Those of you about to be promoted prematurely, we salute you.

SUCCESS IS... convincing one person to say 'Visa Cash App Racing Bulls'
FAILURE IS... having to send an SOS to Daniel Ricciardo again

09

TG PREDICTS 7th place

WILLIAMS

ALEX ALBON THA [23] **CARLOS SAINZ** ESP [55]

Williams embarrassed itself by not having enough spares to field both cars in Australia last year, a PR nightmare that could've been avoided by having *two* drivers who could keep it on the island. With Sainz arriving from Ferrari, that wrong has been righted. Just need the FW47 to be fast(er) now.

SUCCESS IS... not having to write off a chassis every other week
FAILURE IS... giving up to focus on the 2026 car by April

10

TG PREDICTS 10th place

KICK SAUBER

NICO HÜLKENBERG DEU [27] **GABRIEL BORTOLETO** BRA [5]

Sauber is in stasis. Next year it will be Audi, but in the meantime it needs to focus on fixing its fundamental lack of pace and pitstop problems. Has thrown a Hail Mary by hiring F1's most experienced non podium finisher and an untested F2 champion.

SUCCESS IS... being competitive enough to not scare Audi off for 2026
FAILURE IS... scoring even fewer points than last year

2025 RACE CALENDAR

AUSTRALIA 16 MARCH
CHINA 23 MARCH
JAPAN 6 APRIL
BAHRAIN 13 APRIL
SAUDI ARABIA 20 APRIL
USA, MIAMI 4 MAY
ITALY, EMILIA-ROMAGNA 18 MAY
MONACO 25 MAY
SPAIN 1 JUNE
CANADA 15 JUNE
AUSTRIA 29 JUNE
UK 6 JULY
BELGIUM 27 JULY
HUNGARY 3 AUGUST
NETHERLANDS 31 AUGUST
ITALY, MONZA 7 SEPTEMBER
AZERBAIJAN 21 SEPTEMBER
SINGAPORE 5 OCTOBER
USA, AUSTIN 19 OCTOBER
MEXICO 26 OCTOBER
BRAZIL 9 NOVEMBER
USA, LAS VEGAS 22 NOVEMBER
QATAR 30 NOVEMBER
ABU DHABI 7 DECEMBER

KEY:
🟩 Cancel *all* plans, this should be lit
🟧 Tune in if there's nowt else good on
🟥 Ah, what a fine day for a nap

TG BOOKIE'S ODDS

MAX GETS RACE BAN FOR SWEARING 3-1
LEWIS BEMOANS TYRES IN FLUENT ITALIAN 2-9
FERNANDO LAPS FIELD AFTER NEWEY'S FIRST AERO UPDATE 10-1
RUSSELL AND VERSTAPPEN AGREE WINNER TAKES ALL CAGE FIGHT 20-1
FIA BANS SMILING 50-1
HADJAR PROMOTED TO RED BULL OVER TSUNODA 100-1
WILLIAMS RUNS OUT OF SPARES, BREAKS OUT GAFFER TAPE 250-1
ALPINE GOES NOT-FOR-PROFIT, RUN ENTIRELY BY VOLUNTEERS 1,000-1
NORTH KOREAN GRAND PRIX ANNOUNCED 5,000-1

IMAGES: GETTY

MAR

Following the Lamborghini Sterrato and Porsche 911 Dakar, the trend for go anywhere supercars continues… but this takes things to a whole new level

WORDS TOM FORD
PHOTOGRAPHY MARK RICCIONI

INVA

TIAN
SION

We've literally run out of road.

There we were, happily surfing a wave of torque provided by a RUF tuned Porsche flat six, the tea kettle boil of boost causing the car to squirm very slightly on upshifts on the hot tarmac, each tiny snatch of silence between gears like the pause before someone reveals a secret. The air is filled with the howl of an Akrapovič titanium exhaust and sparkling grains of sand are siphoned from the road surface by the car's passing. Glorious. But very suddenly there's a lot of braking and the chunky tyres are groaning under the effort of managing traction the other way. It's not a gentle wash of windblown sand that's veiled the road, but a blunt downing of tools and a half metre drop into dune from the highway. It's like the desert bit it off, a termination likely to end in a face full of airbag. For most sports cars, this would be the end.

For the Marc Philipp Gemballa Marsien, it's only the beginning. Mainly because at the touch of a button, the Marsien climbs its own suspension to rise from 120mm to 250mm of ground clearance. Nothing to an SUV, a generous amount for a car that looks like a modernised take on a 959 crossed with a GT series car. Which it kind of is.

And yet… not. The Marsien is billed as an "adventure sports car", inspired by Paris-Dakar cars from back in the day. Originally designed by Alan Derosier, he of the Porsche 908/04 concept, it is the first car from Marc Philipp Gemballa, the second generation of a very famous name in Porsche modifying. Marc is the son of Uwe Gemballa, who started the original company, but that corporate entity is now owned elsewhere, hence the careful designation of Marc's separate enterprise. The Marsien – the French word for martian – is the first car in what feels like a beautiful rebirth from that next generation of human, and was developed in the UAE's red sands, which look a little like Mars. And it's not a restomod or a tuner car, but a limited series production of 40 vehicles.

This one is based on the bones of a contemporary Porsche Turbo S, with a body made entirely of carbon fibre by a company that supplies five different F1 teams. Every panel changed. The engine is re-engineered by legendary tuner RUF into either 750bhp/686lb ft as standard, or 830bhp as an option, the adjustable suspension is by KW Automotive, though there is a fixed, rally style suspension option by Rieger with a fixed ride height. There's a completely redesigned new double wishbone suspension system with entirely different kinematics, articulation, driveshafts, the lot. Even the wheelarches are reshaped, the intercoolers moved, the modified driveshafts converted to house Cayenne knuckles for more flexibility. There's a front mounted radiator (beneath that duct in the nose), completely flat aluminium underbody armour and that bespoke Akrapovič exhaust. Even the wing mirrors that ape the RSR cars are bespoke, as are the doorhandles, and there's an onboard plumbed-in tyre compressor system under the front decklid. The list goes on, each piece TÜV approved – and the German authorities are no joke. This is no mere bodykit.

Still, it's a car that needs to be seen out in the world. It's got that sense of purpose that means it's more fascinating than purely beautiful, the author of its own little bubble of street presence. Not the gaudy tracksuit of the modern mid engined supercar, or the visual Teflon of a modern restomod, but something else. It doesn't look like a tuner car, not 'modified'. There are obviously hints of 959 in the rear spoiler, with even vague gestures of the 935 Moby Dick at the rear, where it looks like the Marsien ate a 992 911. All of which are good things. But it gets better when you check the fit and finish, start poking around the car with a critical eye, and realise that the Marsien is, in lots of ways, better finished than most OEM cars.

Tom likes to bring backups with him, just in case. Cars and components

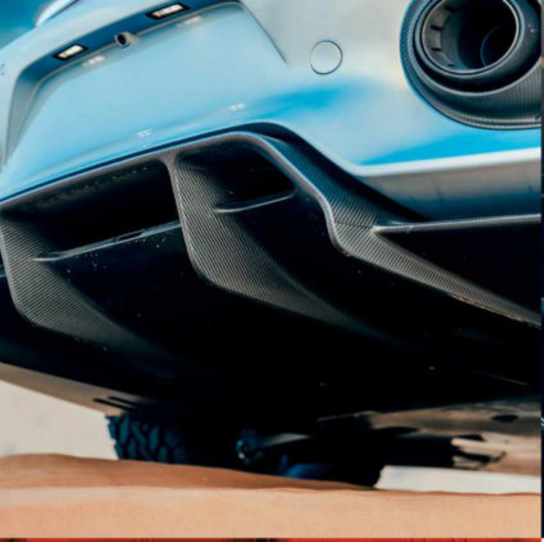
"THE PROOF IS IN THE DRIVING. IF IT CAN'T PERFORM, IT'S ALL POINTLESS"

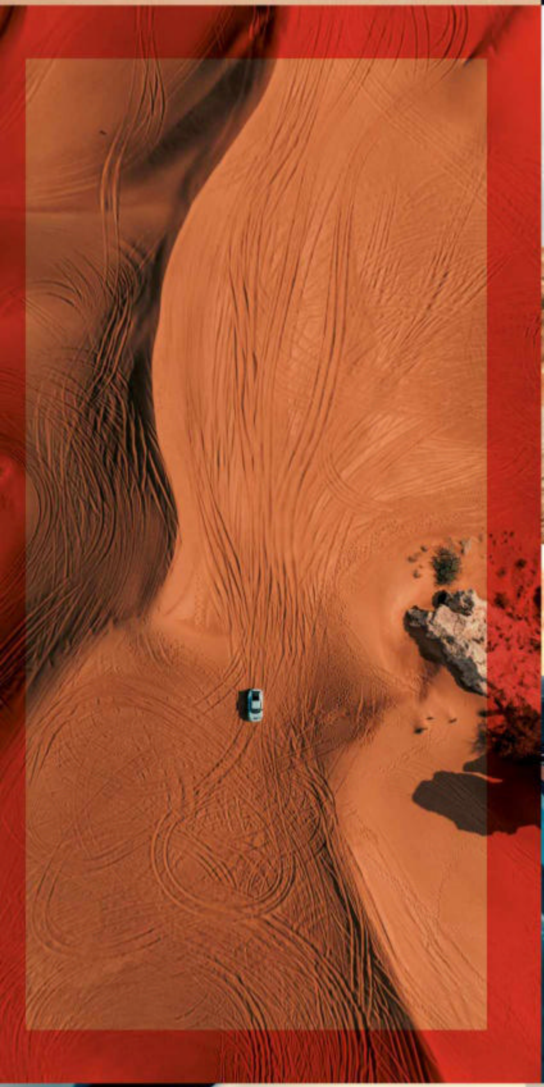
As for the interior, there's a feeling of a less is more approach. It's very Porsche – and none the worse for that, Porsche having possibly the most ergonomic and logical interiors in the world. And the Marsien still has that sense of build quality that's akin to a well polished hardwood floor. Yes, there's a raised centre console inspired by the Carrera GT and some nicely tinted carbon (including the roll cage, which can be replaced by rear seats, should you prefer), plus GT series fabric doorhandles and a few logos, but it's a sensible and stylish rework rather than an apocalypse of skittish veneer and questionable fabrics.

The proof, however, is in the driving. You can be as tasteful as you like, but if it can't perform, then it's all pointless. Porsche already cooks up this flavour of 911 with the Dakar, so the benchmark is high. But to lead with the good bit, the Marsien delivers a unique experience both on road and off. And with a character all of its own.

On the road, it feels like a Turbo S with marginal extra shove. The turbos in this car are not of the slow burning fuse variety, but go from dormant to vicious whistle in surprisingly few rpm. The 'standard' specification comes with a RUF engineered 750bhp variant of the standard 3.8-litre twin turbo Porsche Turbo S flat six, the option package some 830bhp. This is enough, Marc Gemballa's attitude that the relentless quest for ever higher horsepower numbers is a rather pointless game. A car must be fast and responsive, yes. But respectable is enough. After just a few in-gear pulls, you realise the Marsien is more than respectable, but the Turbo S is already a very fast car, so it walks a line between being a bit of a handful and silly. But to be honest, it's incredibly comfy in road mode, dribbled around with minimum fuss. You could genuinely daily this.

Of course, in the desert, there are no roads. A place where maps change like they're alive, where geography gets itchy feet and wanders around like it has a heartbeat, ignoring the slow progress of mountains. But in a car like this, the whole place becomes one endless directional possibility. Just point and shoot. Jink left and you go almost 45° up a molten dune, right and you surf a dusty golden wave to the bottom of a shallow gorge. Head straight and you'll end up on either flat sand plains or rolling breakers of desert





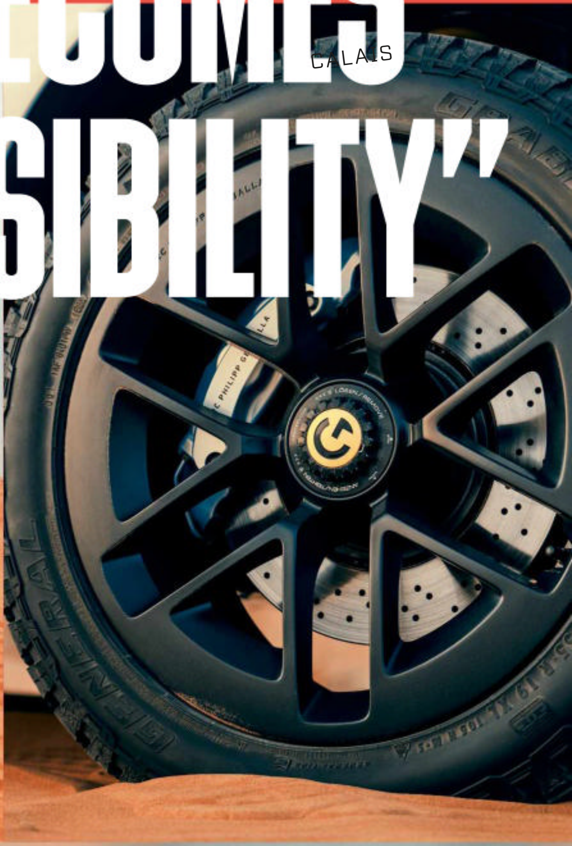
More traditional desert transport eyes up the competition

911 Turbo interior left largely alone... this is A Good Thing

Now go and watch the video on *topgear.com*

We reckon he did it on purpose so he show off his new Fisher Price spade

"IN A CAR LIKE THIS, THE WHOLE PLACE BECOMES ONE ENDLESS POSSIBILITY"



Fun fact: this is Mr Gemballa's actual living room road that test the suspension to the limits of travel in both directions. At no point does the Marsien struggle. Yes, it's still a sports car – lob it at too sharp an angle and you'll be using the front splitter as a shovel – land it too hard and you'll find the bump stops eventually, but the capability is deeply impressive. The best bit is that the car doesn't chew through the landscape like an off roader, but rather skitters across it like an insect, glomming the surface tension together to skate on the surface, rather than dig under it. This, of course, is a tough environment in which to manage traction, simply because the sand can't really decide what kind of sand it wants to be. Some bits are packed and solid, some parts glittery and slick, some like wading in talcum powder. Grip is likely – if not guaranteed – to be different at each corner, and it's a testament to Porsche's traction management that the Marsien doesn't just pirouette in increasingly meaningless circles. Porsche does good work, even if the Marsien has very different code.

In fact, your brain starts to clot over with the ease of it, and you get more and more stupid. It's probably worth mentioning here that there was a very slight issue with the traction control system on the blue car we drove, where a certain set of values were slightly wonky, meaning that the traction control system wouldn't switch entirely off, something that couldn't be fixed in the desert. Happily, MPG also brought along another Marsien with completely disabled traction systems, and the combination of Porsche all wheel drive and light weight – the Marsien weighs the same as a normal Turbo S – gave us all the dynamic impressions we needed. This is a performance car that acts more like a desert buggy off road, charging about with abandon. Yes, we got it stuck, but only once, and that was more operator error than anything else. And yes, the fat all terrain tyres scythe some of the precision from road driving, but luckily, customers get street and off road tyres (mounted on their own forged centre lock wheels) thrown in as standard, and on street rubber, you're looking at 0–62mph in 2.6 seconds and a 208mph top speed. More than anything else, it's like a rallycross car that's grown up and started to pay attention to how it dresses.

We spent a couple of days playing with both the production Marsien and the prototype, and the team behind it. And there's a lot to like. Marc Gemballa is a young CEO at 31 – young, passionate and thoughtful, as well as having an eye for detail, and his own personal history, that'll make for cars with a story and heritage. But more than that, he's assembled The Avengers of parts supply and engineering to produce a car that's one hell of a debut.

And the cost of all this? Well, a Marsien requires a Porsche 911 Turbo S (£168k brand new) and €500,000 (£414k at current exchange rates). Which means an all in price of very roughly £582,000. There's obviously lots of headroom in the options catalogue, but in a world of multimillion pound restomods, for a limited series production car (a 911 Dakar is £173k in a run of 2,500), that seems like conspicuous relative value. There's just one problem though – at least 40 rich people have thought so too and the Marsien is already sold out, closeted in whichever personal Area 51 houses these things. But there's more to come from Marc Gemballa's outfit, and if this Martian is anything to go by, we should welcome an invasion.

If you're watching your rev counter in the dunes, you're not driving hard enough

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MARC PHILIPP GEMBALLA MARSIEN

Price: £582,000 (approx)
Engine: RUF 3745cc twin turbo, flat six, 750bhp, 686lb ft (830bhp option)
Transmission: 8spd PDK, AWD
Performance: 0–62mph in 2.6secs, 208mph
Economy: 21.2mpg, 254g/km CO_2
Weight: 1,794kg

“LOB IT TOO SHARP AND YOU’LL BE USING THE FRONT SPLITTER AS A SHOVEL”

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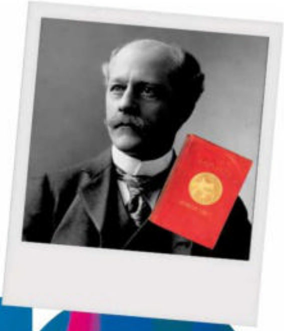
PADDY POWER!

Is carbon neutral e-fuel the silver bullet petrolheads are praying for? We speak to ex F1 engineer Paddy Lowe, who's leading the charge

WORDS SAM PHILIP **PHOTOGRAPHY** TOM BARNES

zero
gasoline
zero fuel reinvented
zero.co
20L



In the early 1900s, an American astronomer named Percival Lowell spent 15 years of his life attempting to convince the world he'd discovered canals on Mars.

A passionate believer in intelligent extraterrestrial life, Lowell penned a series of books explaining why the faint pattern of lines he'd observed on the Martian surface through his Victorian era telescopes proved beyond doubt that the red planet had once been colonised by a tribe of enthusiastic canal builders.

Lowell wasn't a daft man. A respected mathematician and scientist, his astronomical research would later lead to the discovery of Pluto. But his desperate desire to fit the threadbare evidence to his 'clever aliens' hypothesis – to prove true the thing he desperately wished to be true – led him to ditch his critical faculties and become, well, Mr Martian Canals.

When it comes to e-fuel – manmade, carbon neutral liquid fuel that can power any existing petrol or diesel car without modification – I do worry we might have gone a bit Percival Lowell. By 'we', I mean people who like internal combustion engines: the noise, the excitement, the convenience, the fact they don't need to be tediously recharged every hour and a half.

And the promise of a technology that allows us to keep our lovely noisy exciting engines, but without any guilt, any compromise… well, doesn't it seem almost too perfect? Is there a risk we're suspending our objective judgement, cherry picking the evidence, because we so desperately want them to be the silver bullet?

In search of answers, I sought out Paddy Lowe, the former F1 engineer now at the vanguard of the e-fuel movement. After three decades building F1 cars that amassed a dozen world championships and more than 150 race wins at Williams, Mercedes and McLaren, in 2020 Lowe founded Zero Petroleum, a synthetic fuel startup based in Bicester, Oxfordshire.

And here's what you need to know about Paddy Lowe. Paddy Lowe isn't really bothered about keeping your daggy Honda S2000 going for a few more years.

"Look, I love engines," he admits. "We all love burning. That's a very human thing. Combustion engines are exciting. But I'm not doing this from an emotional point of view, to save the motor car or something. We're not making e-fuels to preserve the engines."

This, I think, is reassuring. So if not to save our V8s, why is Lowe burning the (carbon neutral) candle at both ends to make e-fuels a reality?

"Because you can't electrify everything," he explains. "Anything you can electrify, great. I like electric cars. But there are many things in the world you literally can't electrify. Or that economically don't work."

For example? "The simplest one would be an aircraft. You can electrify a little thing that flies one person for 10 miles. But a meaningful airliner literally can't be electrified. It won't take off because it would be 50 times heavier [than a jet fuelled craft]."

But battery technology is improving year on year. The energy density of electric car batteries has doubled, give or take, in the last decade. Surely, if that rate of progress continues, it won't be so very long before a battery powered Boeing is realistic? Afraid not, says Lowe.

"Yes, battery technology is improving, but it'll never reach that point. It's fundamental physics. In an electric battery, you're storing electrons. And those electrons are attached to heavy molecules. That's dead weight that sits there to carry these electrons around.

"But combustion of a hydrocarbon is a dramatically different density of energy. There may be things we don't yet know about, but if you talk to a chemist or a physicist, they agree – batteries will never reach the energy density of molecular energy."

OK, what about hydrogen? "If you built a hydrogen A320, you'd walk through business class, open the curtains to economy, and it would be a hydrogen tank. Hydrogen is not a dense energy store."

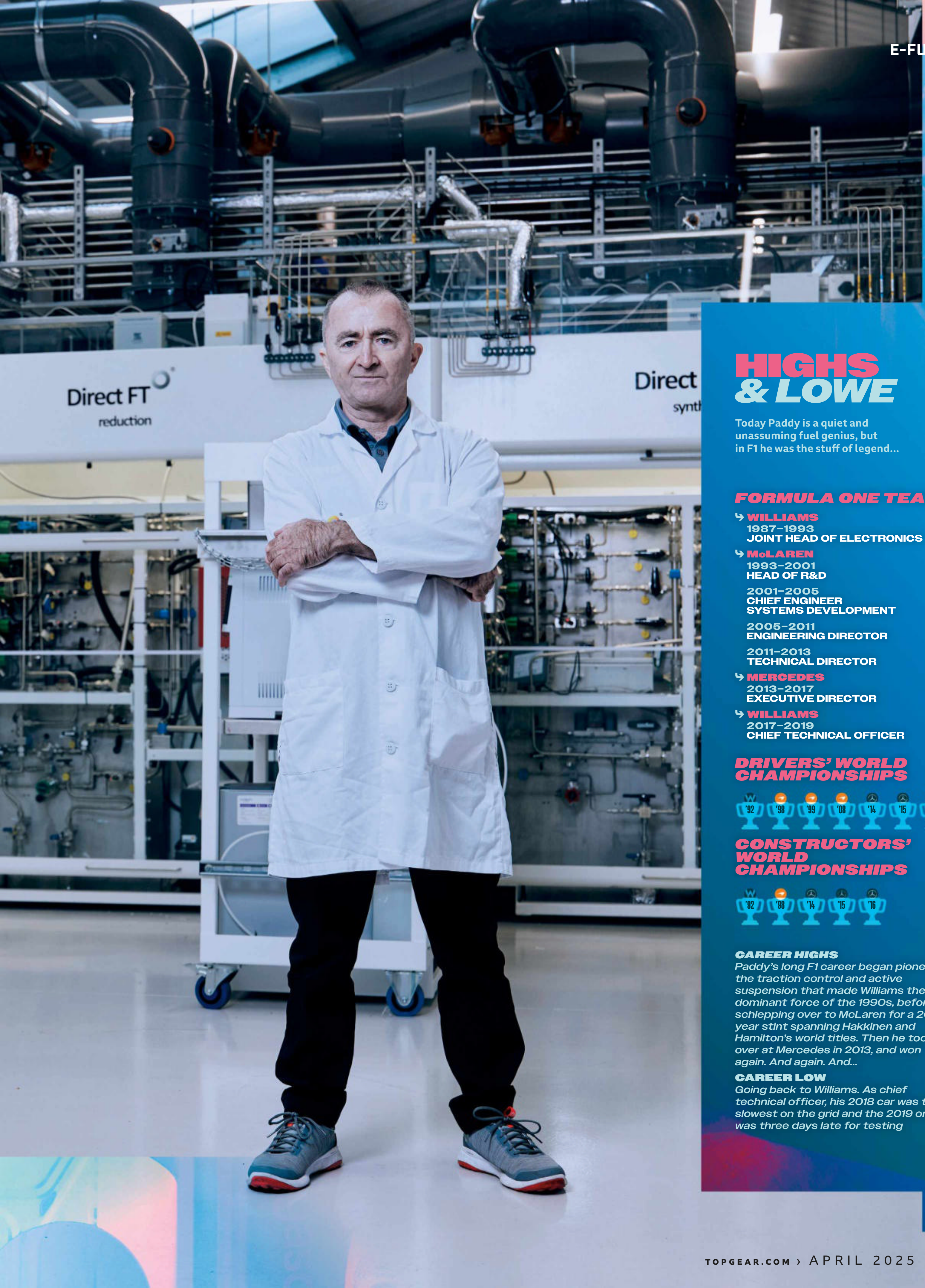
That, says Lowe, is what e-fuels are really about. Not preserving some ancient beloved technology, but because physics and chemistry dictates liquid hydrocarbons are, in terms of weight and space, the only way to feed our most energy hungry vehicles – trucks, ships, agriculture, industrial mining equipment – the energy they need. (Apart from nuclear, but that's a whole different article.)

So how do you brew up a piping hot batch of e-fuel? First, you assemble your raw ingredients, both free and effectively unlimited: air and water.

The other thing you'll need – if you want your synthetic fuel to be carbon neutral at least – is a renewable energy source: wind, hydroelectric, solar. To begin the brewing process, you first use that energy to electrolyse your water, splitting it into hydrogen and oxygen. The hydrogen you keep, the oxygen you ditch.

"So now I've got my hydrogen," explains Lowe. "The other molecule I need is carbon, so you're going to get CO_2 from the air through a process called direct air capture."

Then you chemically combine your hydrogen and carbon to create liquid hydrocarbons, through a complicated collection of reactions known as the Fischer-Tropsch process. This isn't a new technology – Fischer-Tropsch was developed a century ago in Germany to turn coal into liquid fuel – but one that's been fine



HIGHS & LOWE

Today Paddy is a quiet and unassuming fuel genius, but in F1 he was the stuff of legend...

FORMULA ONE TEAMS

WILLIAMS
1987–1993
JOINT HEAD OF ELECTRONICS

McLAREN
1993–2001
HEAD OF R&D

2001–2005
CHIEF ENGINEER
SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT

2005–2011
ENGINEERING DIRECTOR

2011–2013
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

MERCEDES
2013–2017
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WILLIAMS
2017–2019
CHIEF TECHNICAL OFFICER

DRIVERS' WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

'92 '98 '99 '08 '14 '15 '16

CONSTRUCTORS' WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

'92 '98 '14 '15 '16

CAREER HIGHS
Paddy's long F1 career began pioneering the traction control and active suspension that made Williams the dominant force of the 1990s, before schlepping over to McLaren for a 20 year stint spanning Hakkinen and Hamilton's world titles. Then he took over at Mercedes in 2013, and won again. And again. And...

CAREER LOW
Going back to Williams. As chief technical officer, his 2018 car was the slowest on the grid and the 2019 one was three days late for testing

Direct FT
reduction
Direct FT
synthesis
CAUTION WET FLOOR

“WE MODEL THAT WE CAN GET E-FUELS DOWN TO THE COST OF FOSSIL FUELS WITHIN 10 YEARS”

This is also where Paddy brews his signature Christmas hooch for family and friends

NITROGEN
CARBON MONOXIDE
OPTION 3

tuned in recent years by Zero and others at the forefront of e-fuel development. "We have our own proprietary process we call direct FT, which has much higher performance than classic Fischer-Tropsch," explains Lowe. "We're able to put those two molecules together to make a refinery grade fuel."

And when you burn your freshly brewed e-fuel – in your aircraft, supertanker or Vauxhall Corsa – the carbon dioxide that emerges from your tailpipe is the same carbon dioxide you extracted from the air to make the fuel in the first place. True carbon neutrality.

Today, Zero Petroleum brews its synthetic fuel in small quantities at its Zero.1 research plant, using energy harvested from solar panels on the factory roof. Lowe describes current production as "single digit litres per day", but says 2025 is when the plant will move to generating tens of litres daily – "potentially hundreds, with a following wind."

Which won't fix global warming overnight. But the point is, synthetic fuel isn't some flight of sci-fi fancy like the perpetual motion machine or cold nuclear fusion. It's being brewed right now, powering engines right now (albeit not many, and not for very long). Synthetic fuels work, scientifically. The question is, do they work economically?

E-fuels are massively energy intensive to produce. Stick a kilowatt hour of fuel in your electric car, it'll propel you around three miles. But use it to generate synthetic fuel for your petrol car, it'll end up propelling you a whole lot less far. You need energy to split your hydrogen from your water, plus a load more energy to capture your carbon from the air, plus a load more energy to convert your hydrogen and carbon into hydrocarbons.

"About 45 per cent of the energy from the solar panel ends up as chemical energy in our fuel," admits Lowe. "So you're losing about 55 per cent. But as we develop and improve the technology, we will be reducing that inefficiency. We think we could get to about 65 per cent."

Nonetheless, using electricity to produce synthetic fuel is, by definition, more wasteful than piping it directly into a battery. And then there's the added inefficiency of the combustion engine. Modern petrol cars convert, on average, around 25 per cent of their fuel's energy into forward motion (and often less). The majority is wasted as heat.

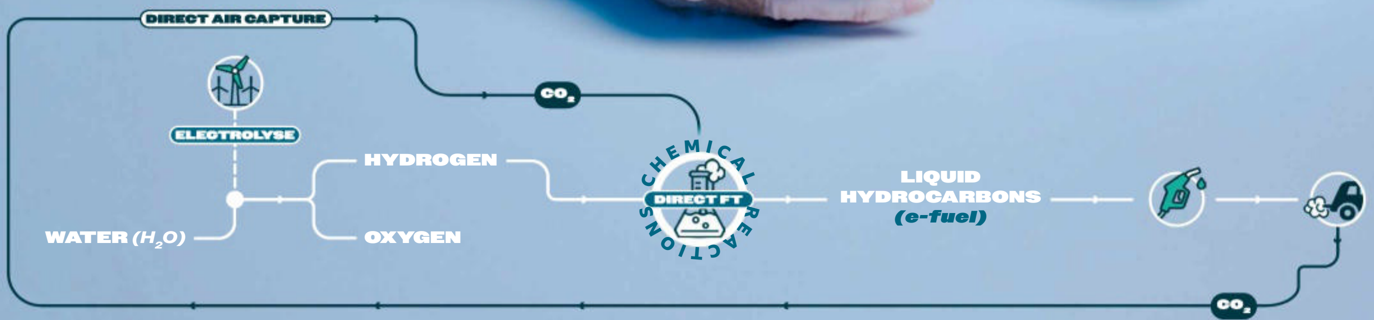
Even if Zero Petroleum one day hits that 65 per cent efficiency goal, that'd still mean barely a sixth of the green energy going into the magic e-fuel machine would actually reach the wheels of your Ford Fiesta. That same kilowatt hour of fuel that sent your EV three miles might get your petrol car around 650 metres.

So if the gas power station on the edge of your local town is pumping out electricity, you're better using that juice to charge your Tesla directly, rather than run that e-fuel plant you just built in your backyard. But, as electricity grids around the world decarbonise, that increasingly won't be how, and where, electricity is generated.

"Where are we going to generate the colossal amount of energy we use on the planet today, and currently dig out the ground?" asks Lowe. "You have to generate it in really remote places where nobody lives. Deserts in northern Canada where there's loads of water for hydro. The outback of Australia for solar..."

“WHY WOULD YOU GO AND TRY TO GET THE OIL FROM SOMEWHERE WHEN YOU COULD JUST MAKE IT?”

zero
gasoline


DIRECT AIR CAPTURE
CO_2
ELECTROLYSE
HYDROGEN
OXYGEN
WATER (H_2O)
CHEMICAL REACTIONS
DIRECT FT
LIQUID HYDROCARBONS (e-fuel)
CO_2

Or, closer to home, in the sea. The 3,000 or so offshore turbines in Britain's coastal waters already generate vast amounts of electricity when the wind blows. The challenge – at least, one of the challenges – is getting that power where it's needed, when it's needed.

"A liquid fuel is orders of magnitude cheaper than moving electricity and hydrogen over large distances," says Lowe. "That's how we get oil today. It comes from ridiculously remote places called oil wells, and it's very cheap to move by truck, ship, pipe, whatever. E-fuels are actually an energy logistics product. An energy store."

Build your e-fuel plant next to your desert solar array, or under your wind farm, and it can also help solve that other issue with renewables: their unpredictable, intermittent generation, and the fact they don't always make power when people need it. It's as windy in the middle of the night as is it during the day, but no one's blow drying their hair then. With a strategically placed e-fuel plant, you can harvest that surplus energy and store it as liquid fuel. Not wasting electricity, but saving it.

Yes, e-fuels are far less energy efficient than batteries. But that's only an issue when energy's a limited resource. If the cost of solar and wind power continues to plummet, within a few years the world could – could – have a near limitless abundance of cheap, green energy. At that point, brewing e-fuel isn't an energy problem. It's an energy answer.

Should you be so inclined, you can order 20 litres of e-petrol through Zero's website today. It'll arrive at the end of 2025 and will cost you £50,000, which still makes it slightly cheaper on a per mile basis than charging your electric car at a UK motorway service station.

Zero's fuel doesn't quite cost £2,500 per litre to brew (that £50k batch is a special 'launch edition' petrol that arrives in a jerry can personally signed by Paddy). Even so, e-fuels currently remain hugely more expensive to produce than fossil fuels. But Lowe says that number should soon nosedive.

"We model that we can get e-fuels down to the cost of fossil fuels within 10 years," he predicts confidently. "It might sound extraordinary, but industrial history will show me to be correct. Look at the cost and power of a mobile phone compared to what computers used to cost.

"To make an e-fuel, the feed stocks are free. Sun, air, water. The bit in the middle is a machine, and all machines in history get better, cheaper, more efficient. So, within 20 years, why would you go and try to get the oil from somewhere when you could just make it? Rather than go and find oil in the North Sea, then wait 10 years to get it on the land, just build a synthetic fuel plant…"

But how many synthetic fuel plants – and how much renewable energy capacity – would we require to generate all the e-fuel the world needs? Well, Lowe's team have calculated that, if you covered 25 per cent of Saudi Arabia in solar panels – it's fine, it's mostly desert – you could generate enough synthetic fuel to sate all the world's current fossil fuel appetite.

NEXT GAS
190
MILES
gasoline
zero

Our glorious future, where a can of petrol is a £50k collectors' item

And that's at current solar efficiency. If solar panels become twice as effective at harvesting energy – not an insane expectation, given their trajectory over the past couple of decades – you'd only need half that area of land. And OK, solar panelling 100,000 square miles of the Middle East might seem mad, but not that mad, right?

And, of course, the point is that e-fuels won't need to replace the world's entire fossil fuel consumption. They'll be part of a mix.

"For the green energy transition to happen, you need three tiers," says Lowe. "You need renewable electrons. You need green hydrogen, for example for making steel. You can't make steel with electrons. And then you need e-fuels."

Synthetic fuels, on their own, won't be the magic one stop solution to our planet's green energy needs. They're not the silver bullet. But they might well be part of the silver arsenal.

Paddy Lowe isn't developing e-fuels to preserve the combustion engined car, or noisy motorsport. But he admits it could be a happy byproduct. When I ask him which car engine he'd be most pleased for his e-fuel to save, he nominates the V10-era F1 units.

"One of my biggest regrets in F1 was that we lost the V8, the V10, the V12 engines," he admits. "We had engines on the dyno that were going to 21,000rpm. The noise and the performance, it was just mindblowing. It was disappointing when they got cut back. But synthetic fuels provide a pathway to bring that back. You can have your cake, and eat it, and feel good about yourself."

As business pitches go, it's not a bad one, right? Come for the guilt free air travel, stay for the guilt free noisy motorsport…

The world being as it is nowadays, it's not often you emerge from a conversation about the future feeling anything other than deep despair. But after an hour chatting to Paddy Lowe, I'm left with the strangest of sensations. I believe they call it… optimism?

At the very least, I emerge feeling reasonably confident I haven't gone full Percival Lowell. E-fuels might be the golden ticket. They might not. But if they do fizzle out, it'll be down to macroeconomics, geopolitics and infrastructure, not because of science.

And if synthetic fuels do end up saving our engines, that'd merely be a fortunate side effect of saving civilisation from a global warming heat death. Which feels a valid reason to root for their success, right?

"We should all be optimistic about what can be done, and what we need to do," says Lowe. "We've just got to get on with it and stop faffing around…"

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RETRO

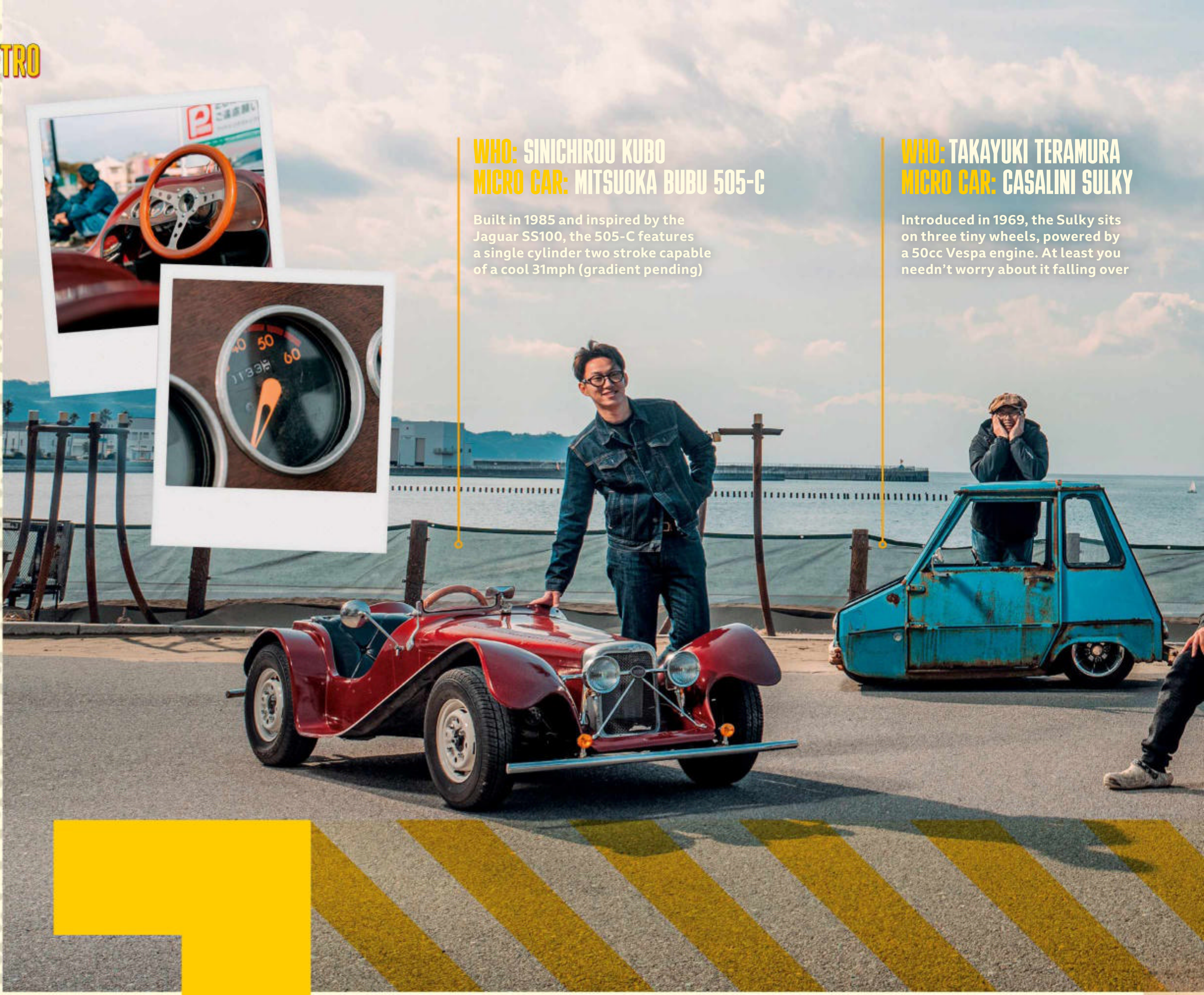
BECAUSE THEY DON'T MAKE 'EM LIKE THEY USED TO

HEADLINER

MICRO MACHINES

There's a man in Japan who's made it his mission to ensure the micro car loves on forever – by building a tiny museum for them

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MARK RICCIONI



WHO: SINICHIROU KUBO
MICRO CAR: MITSUOKA BUBU 505-C

Built in 1985 and inspired by the Jaguar SS100, the 505-C features a single cylinder two stroke capable of a cool 31mph (gradient pending)

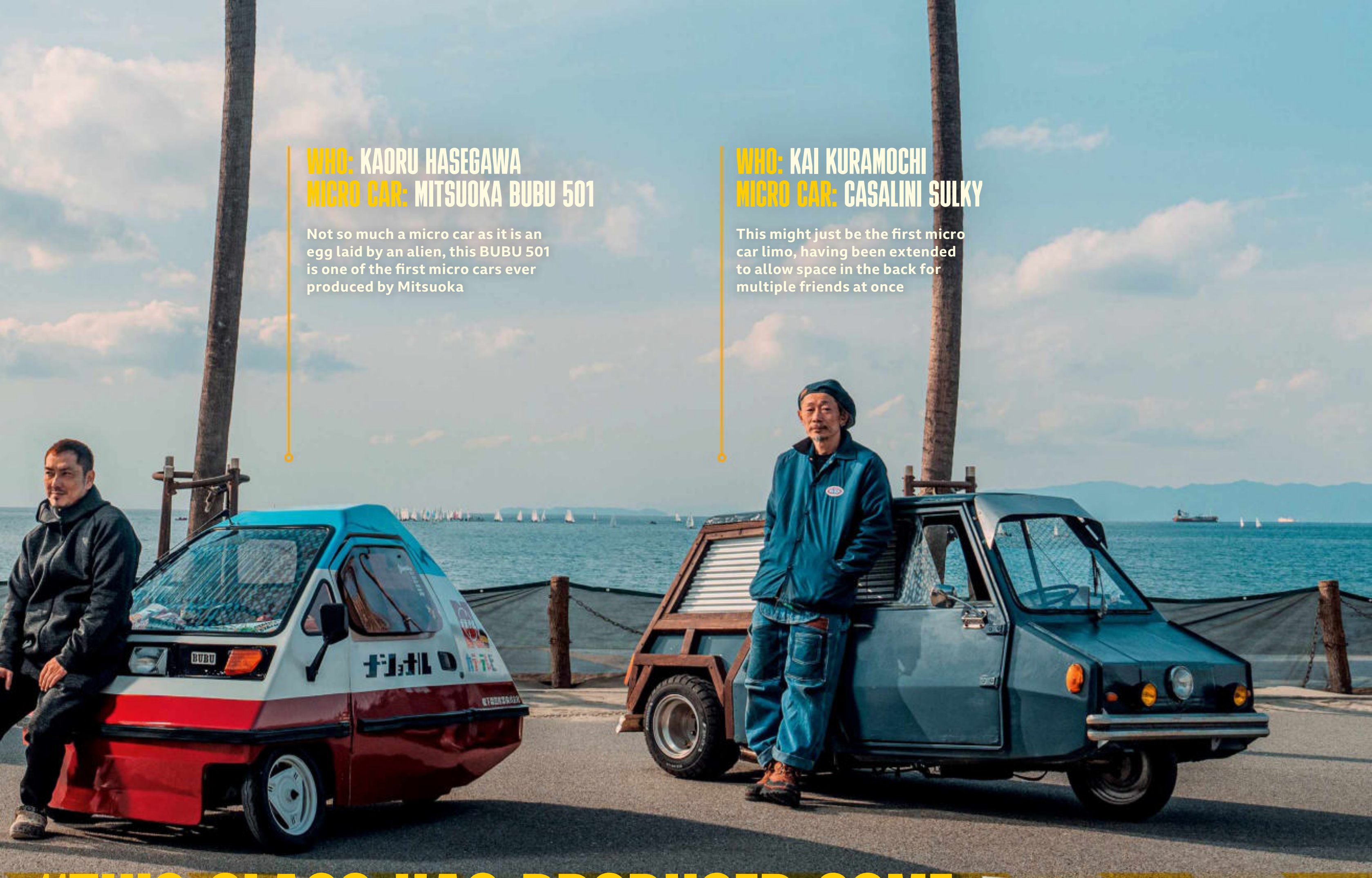
WHO: TAKAYUKI TERAMURA
MICRO CAR: CASALINI SULKY

Introduced in 1969, the Sulky sits on three tiny wheels, powered by a 50cc Vespa engine. At least you needn't worry about it falling over

Japan's vast road network boasts 750,000 miles of tarmac across its sprawling landscape. That might sound a lot, but it also needs to manage some 82 million vehicles – in some of the world's most densely populated cities – on a daily basis. As a country, it should be at a perpetual standstill. Yet ever since the 1950s the Japanese have held a tiny little ace up their sleeves...

Kei-jidõsha, or kei car as it's more commonly known, refers to the smallest category of motor vehicle permitted to drive on Japanese roads and highways. For decades this class has produced some of the most unusually shaped vehicles of anywhere in the world, powered by bike-sized engines with tyres that wouldn't look out of place on a wheelbarrow. In an automotive landscape more bloated and overweight than ever, the Japanese kei car appears to be the cheat code required to beat the system.

This phenomenon first entered service back in 1949 after World War Two. Japan needed to mobilise its country again, but limited resources and a weakened economy meant traditional customer vehicles were out of reach for most. Enter the new 'light vehicle' class, initially limited to a 150cc four stroke engine (or 100cc two stroke) followed by a larger 360cc limit in the



WHO: KAORU HASEGAWA
MICRO CAR: MITSUOKA BUBU 501

Not so much a micro car as it is an egg laid by an alien, this BUBU 501 is one of the first micro cars ever produced by Mitsuoka

WHO: KAI KURAMOCHI
MICRO CAR: CASALINI SULKY

This might just be the first micro car limo, having been extended to allow space in the back for multiple friends at once

> “THIS CLASS HAS PRODUCED SOME OF THE MOST UNUSUALLY SHAPED VEHICLES IN THE WORLD”

SUZUKI
BUBU
8502

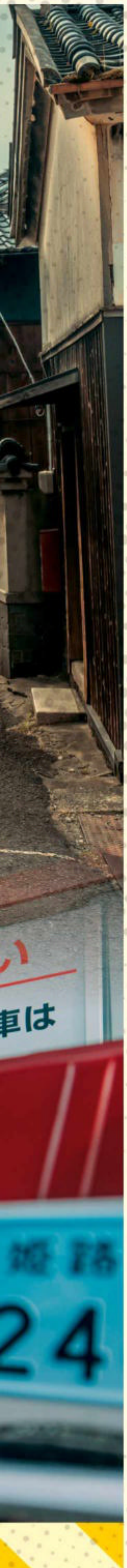
BUBU
Shuttle-50
BUBU
Shuttle-50
Footwork
フットワーク
昭和レトロカー万博
2020
1982
BUBU 501
MITSUOKA

Very convenient to have a car you can stash under the stairs between goes

"KEI CARS ACCOUNT FOR MORE THAN A THIRD OF ALL VEHICLE SALES IN JAPAN"

20分以上の駐車
ご遠慮願いま
お客様専用
docomo

Works part time as a street sweeper, with a matching blue dustpan



mid 1950s. It'd take until 1958 for the first mainstream kei car to really take off – Subaru's 360 – which boasted seating for four while measuring under three metres long.

By the 1990s engine capacity was raised to 660cc, and with manufacturers embarking on forced induction to boost power and efficiency it soon yielded some of the most iconic kei cars to date including the Suzuki Cappuccino, Autozam AZ-1 and Honda Beat. There wasn't an official limit on power, but a gentlemen's agreement capped it at 63bhp. Dimensions, however, have remained the same since 1998 – no longer than 3.4m, no wider than 1.48m and less than 2.0m high. Kei cars don't have to adhere to the same safety standards as non-kei cars, which is also the reason why you rarely seem them sold officially outside of Japan. Not that they're inherently dangerous, but you'd assume the Euro NCAP team wouldn't look too favourably at your own shins forming part of a front end crumple test.

Such is their popularity, kei cars account for more than a third of all vehicle sales in Japan. But rewind back to those formulative years before their popularity boomed, and there was another vehicle trend emerging that made even the smallest kei cars feel like a Hummer in comparison. A class that didn't even require a driving licence to use, because the 1970s would mark the launch of the even wackier world of Japanese micro cars. What's more, the driving force behind them was a manufacturer you'll already be familiar with when it comes to building obscure, alien-like vehicles. Take a bow, Mitsuoka Motor.

Before Mitsuoka spent its days transforming K11 Micras into AI-generated Jaguar Mark IIs, its business centred around importing and servicing European cars for customers across Japan. Founder Susumu Mitsuoka always dreamed of creating his own vehicles, but it wasn't until the late 1970s that he got the opportunity to do so. When a customer brought their Italian micro car in for repairs – a Casalini Sulky – Mitsuoka-san was left frustrated that he couldn't find the parts required to fix it. Rather than give up, Mitsuoka-san adopted the optimistic *TG* attitude, declaring 'How hard can it be?'. Several years later in 1982, Mitsuoka's first complete car was born – the BUBU Shuttle-50.

To call it a car by modern standards might be pushing it, though it does have doors, wing mirrors and a windscreen. Its engine measured just 50cc driving a single wheel at the rear, with two further wheels up front doing the steering. But this wasn't Mitsuoka being weird for the sake of it – its goal was to mobilise all Japanese people and thanks to its 50cc engine with steering, throttle and braking controlled by handle bars, the BUBU-Shuttle 50 only needed a moped licence to be legally driven on the road. What's more, its rear opening door – complete with fold out ramps – allowed it to be used by those with disabilities thanks to the hand controls. It could even fit through a doorway, meaning you didn't need the luxury of a garage or off-street parking to store it.

The BUBU Shuttle-50 was quickly joined by the BUBU 501 in the same year, a smaller, sleeker model which still only featured a 50cc engine and three wheels, albeit with the addition of a steering wheel. Three years later, the BUBU 505-C joined the range, mimicking a quarter scale Morgan Roadster. And while Mitsuoka then shifted into full size vehicles from the late 1980s onwards, its micro car vision remained part of its model range all the way up to 2007.

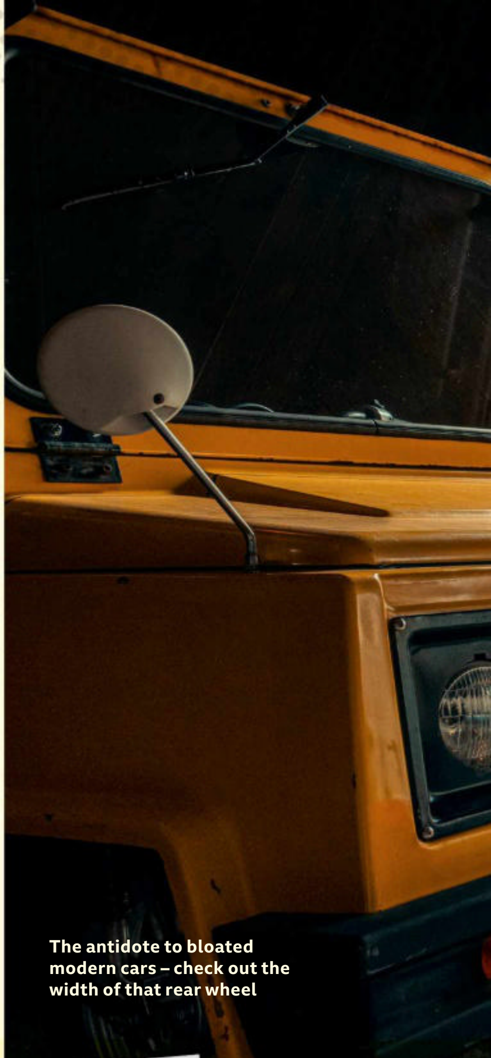
Stancenation
Stancenation
STANCE JAPAN

Looks like dashboard clutter, then you realise that's the entire boot

Every vehicle – despite looking obscure even by Mitsuoka standards – served a very important role that even kei cars couldn't fulfil. Not only were they even more convenient for navigating Japan's (often) tiny roads, but a moped licence was considerably cheaper to obtain than the equivalent car one. While sales were never really booming, the micro car market went from strength to strength right until the late 1980s, when a regulation change would all but seal their fate. Aside from safety now being quite important, micro cars would also now require a full driving licence to operate – dramatically slashing their appeal. However, decades on there's one man in Japan who has made it his life's mission to carry on the legacy of this bizarre era of Japanese motoring, Wakayama-based Kaoru Hasegawa.

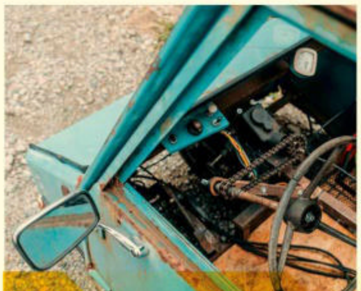
"I got my first micro car nearly 30 years ago," Hasegawa-san proudly states. "I have always enjoyed small vehicles, and I was actually given my first micro car. It had been abandoned in the corner of a car shop out in the countryside, so I spent time restoring it and started driving it around. It was so much fun, and the reaction from other people was amazing. I knew I wanted another micro car, so shortly after I started looking around and researching the history of them."

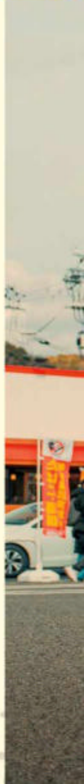
Despite thousands being sold across Japan, tracking down a good, working model is becoming as difficult as unearthing rare



The antidote to bloated modern cars – check out the width of that rear wheel

0 10 20 30 40 50 60
km/h
HONDA





supercars – mainly because most people bought micro cars for quick and easy transport rather than something to cherish and collect. For Hasegawa-san, he knows this is half the appeal too. Many of us are familiar with the BMW Isetta and Peel P50 – both of which were sold throughout Europe in much larger numbers – but what makes the Japanese models even more desirable is how much smaller and rarer they were in comparison. Hasegawa-san's collection now features more than 10 models, and despite being 30 years into his obsession he's still on a lookout for more.

"When they were new, micro cars could be driven with a moped licence, so they sold very well," he adds. "Especially among housewives, as they had been designed to allow people to move quickly with luggage or shopping in all weather conditions. They were much cheaper than a car and could be stored in a normal house easily. But when the new law was passed meaning that owners needed a driving licence to run them, the sales stopped and dealers turned their attention towards kei cars instead."

Hasegawa-san is more than just a collector of these oddities. For years he's shared his love for them across social media, and it wasn't long before he was being inundated with messages from intrigued car fans trying to decipher what they were looking at, or likeminded micro car enthusiasts who – in many cases – assumed the early Mitsuoka BUBU models would never be seen again. His collection expands beyond Japanese cars, however. Two of his cherished models include the Italian Casalini Sulky and All Cars Snuggy Charly, and yes those are the actual names. Given the global interest his humble little collection had gained, Hasegawa-san decided that it was time to create an actual museum for them. That might sound like a vast and expensive project to undertake, until you realise that all of his collection fits quite comfortably in a normal downstairs garage.

"I created the WAZUKA Micro Car Museum because of the messages I kept receiving on social media from people wanting to see the real things," he adds. "There are many car museums in Japan, but there is no museum anywhere that specialises in micro cars! So, I thought I would make one myself. All of the cars on display are in good, original condition while also being the models produced in the least numbers. I have travelled all across Japan to find them, and the friends who are gathered here with me were all enthusiasts met along the way."

Rather fittingly, the WAZUKA Micro Car Museum is located on a tiny street, crammed into a tiny, terraced house with the upstairs living quarters littered with tiny memorabilia. From the outside it is completely unassuming, but its charm is only matched by the quirky vehicles it houses behind the wooden slatted garage door. Despite this, Hasegawa-san regularly hosts micro car gatherings by inviting friends and enthusiasts along – including Sinchirou Kubo and his Morgan-like BUBU 505C, Kai Kuramochi who has stretched his Casalini Sulky in order to carry passengers, and Takayuki Teramura whose Casalini Sulky is slammed so low to the ground it'll beach on any speed bump if he doesn't approach it fast enough. These four owners and their cars will shut down any street with intrigue and crooked necks more than any firespitting Lamborghini could dream of. All four will fit in a single 7-Eleven parking bay, and providing you go nowhere near a highway their top speeds can vary between 40mph and 50mph depending on wind direction and road gradient. They are unlike anything else you'll see on the roads, and their intrigue is one that captivates just about every age and generation.

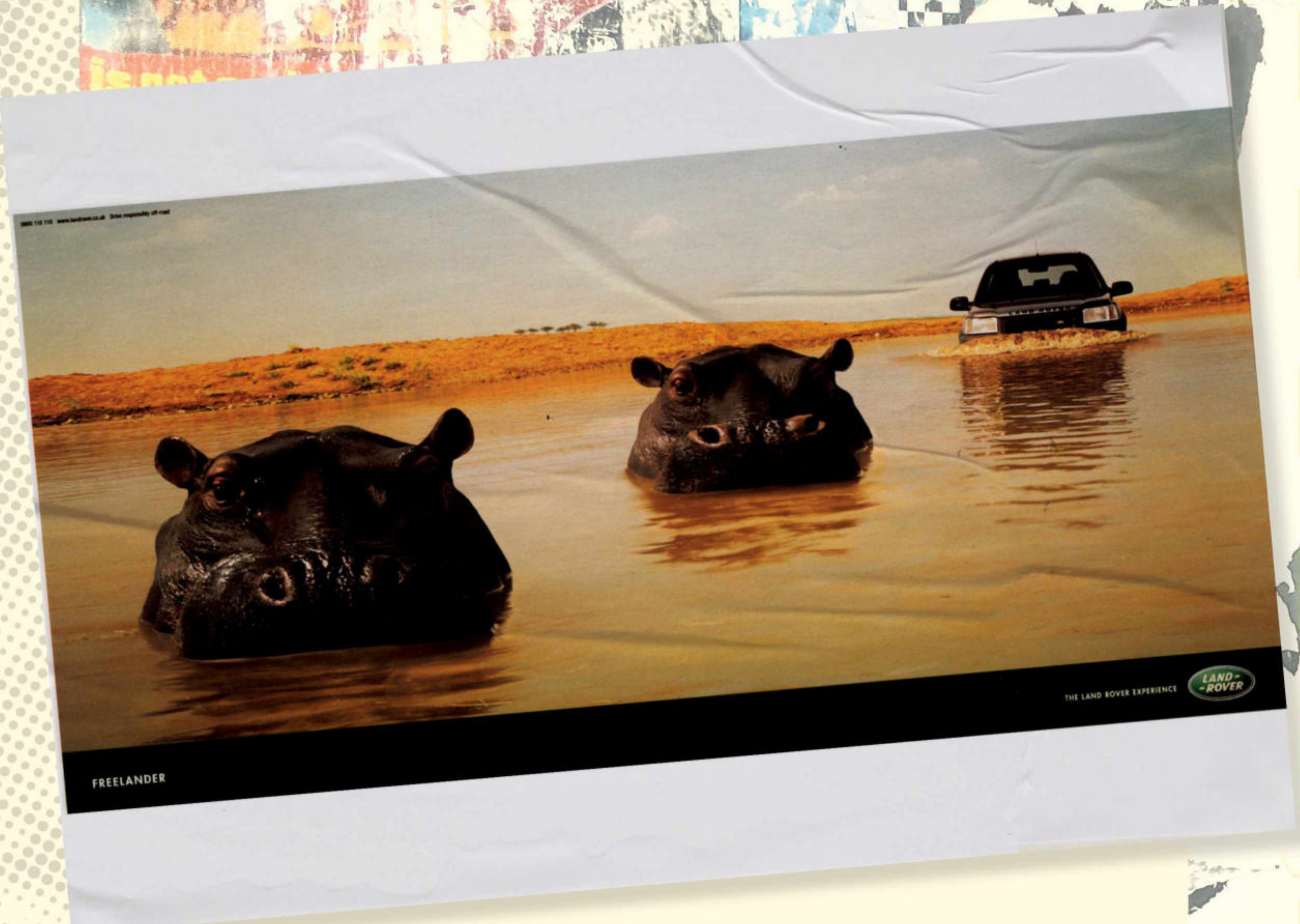
"We don't get many tourists down here!" Hasegawa-san laughs, which is unsurprising given the fact it's a seven-hour drive from Tokyo and two hours south of Osaka. "But my goal is to tell everyone about the museum and show them the history of the micro car. I am always looking for more cars to add – it is half the fun with micro cars, because they often end up in the most obscure and unusual places. So to bring as many together as possible – and keep them in good usable condition – is a dream for me that I will continue to live out as long as I can."

Kaoru Hasegawa's WAZUKA micro car museum is located in Kainan in Wakayama prefecture, Japan. To arrange a visit, you can pop him a message at @kaoru.bubu on Instagram.

SUZUKI
ナショナル
カラーテレビ
ナショナル
松下電器産業株式会社
ヤマザキ
山崎製パン(株)

“THESE CARS WILL SHUT DOWN ANY STREET MORE THAN ANY LAMBORGHINI COULD DREAM OF”

NTT docomo
ドライブスルー
丸亀製麺
うどん
お客様へ
20分
ご遠慮
ナショナル
docomo


THE LAND ROVER EXPERIENCE
LAND ROVER
FREELANDER

Car ads that time forgot

FREELANDER, 1990s

A picture is worth a thousand words, apparently. Case in point above. There's just no need for a slogan when the creative concept is this strong. Land Rover is subtly showing off the Freelander's wading capabilites, while at the same time categorically underlining that, though the Freelander is the baby of the family, it's still a 'proper' Land Rover. A simple idea, executed brilliantly. Hippo, hippo, hooray

IMAGES: ALAMY

FAMILY AFFAIR

That time we...

WENT ON A PAGANI ROADTRIP

It's 2013. There's a new car on the hypercar radar – Pagani's Huayra – and we needed to experience it... so we signed ourselves up for one of the most exclusive road rallies on the planet, Pagani's Raduno.

This was in the early days of modern supercar rallies, so we were free to snake in a carbon fibre clad conga line around Tuscany undisturbed. I rode shotgun, with Horacio driving, and often mistaking his fingers for Ringo Starr's drumsticks, tapping the wheel and whistling 'I want to hold your hand' by The Beatles. Behind were Horacio's sons, customers and friends, single file – just – in a boisterous lineage of his creations. An original C12, a Zonda F, the roadster version of the same car, and a very rare Cinque Roadster, looking positively common in the company of the one off Zonda HH. Oh, and a bright orange Zonda with Batman on the front. Subtle.

As roadtrips go, it's one of the more memorable ones. For obvious reasons. But also because we didn't just get a glimpse, but got to live what's in Horacio Pagani's head. And that's since proven to be a very special place indeed.

WORDS: ROWAN HORNCASTLE

REMEMBERING
RETRO GAMING
THE CLASSICS

#66

RoadBlasters

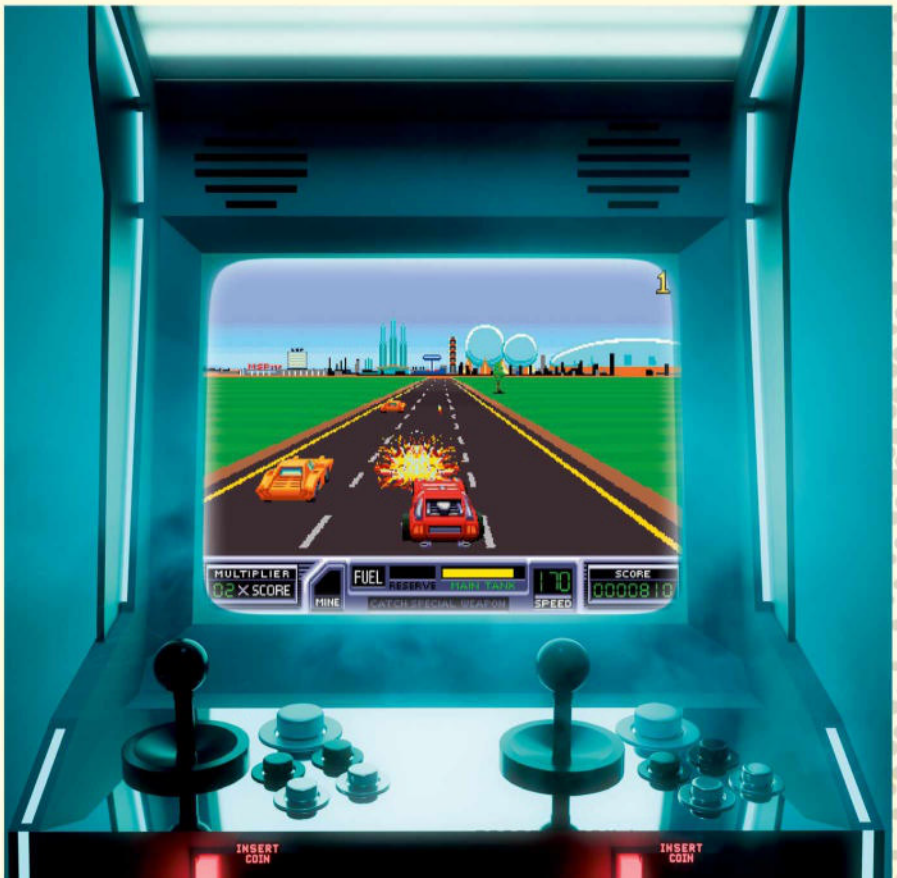
ARCADE, 1987

Released by Atari in 1987, *RoadBlasters* was a sci-fi racer that recognised that the arcade video game staple of shooting absolutely everything in sight could be handily applied to driving games as well. In addition to the traditional driving controls, you had a pair of triggers to fire lasers and thumb buttons to launch your special weapons. Rather than a steering wheel, the arcade cabinet, both in its upright and sleek sit-down incarnations, featured a yoke that was instantly evocative of Knight Rider's KITT. And if you played it at the time it was released you probably had the bouffant 1980s Hasselhoff haircut to match.

The most immediately striking thing about *RoadBlasters* was the impressive animation of the cherry red player car that sat front and centre in the screen. The sprite had a slightly exaggerated perspective, but the rotation as you turned the vehicle was buttery smooth and totally convincing. You needed that responsiveness as well, because you had to accurately point the nose of the vehicle directly at the tangerine coloured enemy cars and roadside turrets in order to score a successful hit. Miscalculate even slightly and the car would detonate in a lavish explosion.

The sci-fi theming lent the game a unique atmosphere, with futuristic bubble cities visible on the horizon and a dropship that swooped down to deposit special weapons onto the roof of your car, even at speeds in excess of 200mph. If that sort of delivery is the next evolution of the fast food drive through, we're here for it.

There's little to criticise about *RoadBlasters*, but we do feel duty bound to point out the fundamental inaccuracy of the title: you're not blasting the road itself, you're blasting things *on* the road. Still, we'll forgive it, you didn't fight any streets in *Street Fighter 2* either. **MIKE CHANNELL**



IMAGES: GETTY

~~DO~~/DON'T MEET YOUR HEROES

BMW M3 E30 (1989)

£29,000 (when new)

2.3 4cyl	215 bhp	0–62 mph 6.7 secs	31.4 mpg	1,200 kg

HERO Iconic boxy look, smiles per gallon

ZERO Powerful for its time, but not as powerful as predicted

THE LOVE BEGAN YEARS AGO. EVERY morning on my way to work I would walk past one. An E30 M3. Something about the shape, the stance, the trim perfection of the profile, the kidney grille (remember that?), the box arches. It was this very car that made me fall in love with old cars in general, but the M3 in particular.

For me, it quickly became *the* car. The one I wanted to own and drive above all others. Reality bit – they're quite a bit of money now. Nevertheless, an E30 stepped into the breach (see p139). Still a limited edition. One of only 400 built in fact. But a Design Edition convertible. I adore it, but it's not an E30 M3.

Discussion point: could this be BMW's most iconic car? Think of its legendary reputation, built around its astonishing motorsport success. Even today, 30 years since it deserted racetracks (presumably to sighs of relief from the opposition), it remains the most successful touring car ever.

And the road cars were only created to homologate the racers. That's genuine motorsport pedigree. Initially the plan was for 5,000 to be built. BMW underestimated demand for the car magnificently. By the end of its production run in 1994, over 15,000 M3s had been built.

They weren't all identical. In total, there were 12 E30 M3 models, from the standard 200bhp car in 1986 to 1990's 230bhp 2.5-litre M3 Evo III. This one is arguably the most special E30 M3 of all. BMW built a limited run of 505 Evo IIs to celebrate the success of its dominant drivers, Johnny Cecotto and Roberto Ravaglia. There were 480 Cecottos and just 25 Ravaglias – the latter made exclusively for the UK market.

And today one of them is mine. Looking at it sitting in a layby on Exmoor I feel both exhilarated and intimidated. Nervous, too. It's been my dream to drive this car, but what's it going to be like getting back into mine afterwards?

In all the excitement, I had completely forgotten all original E30 M3s were left hand drive. That required a small adjustment, as did the realisation it has a dogleg manual gearbox. Sure, 215bhp is nothing these days, but the 2.3-litre S14 engine is renowned as one of the all time greats. I'm expecting fireworks.

I don't think I've ever had a bigger grin on my face from driving a car. The achey cheeks, the daft expression. I love the fact that it feels so light, so easy to see out of, I love the challenge of the gearbox, the curiously angled wheel.

WORDS: KATIE POTTS **PHOTOS:** OLGUN KORDAL

“I DON’T THINK I’VE EVER HAD A BIGGER GRIN ON MY FACE FROM DRIVING A CAR”

A world beater when it was born, and now aging like a fine wine

But where’s the performance? You really have to go looking for it. Ravaglia must have been flat everywhere. My biggest fear was that I’d go back to my own car and be like, “Bleh! this is NOTHING compared to the M3”, but I was shocked to find the power difference wasn’t nearly as dramatic as expected compared with my uprated 2.5L engine.

But it’s the chassis, the balance and steering that made the E30 the force it was and gave it a reputation it has enjoyed for the past 36 years. It’s come a long way since then of course, power has more than doubled as BMW has dabbled with six and eight cylinders, with turbocharging, even four wheel drive. But that’s not how to breed a legend. To do that, you need to go racing.

Overall? It feels like blasphemy to say, but it kind of left me wanting a bit more. I actually came away from it conflicted, thinking that there might be other, later, less legendary M3s that might be more fun to drive. So which side of the fence do I come down on? I could argue this one either way. I’m very glad I had this opportunity, left with a massive smile on my face and the knowledge I had driven an 1980s icon. But getting back into my car wasn’t the trauma I feared it might be. I’ve ticked the box, scratched the itch. That’s enough for now.

DRIVEN

HEAD TO HEAD

GRAND TOURERS

Bentley has gone hybrid, Maserati all electric. What's the best 21st century car for touring grandly?

WORDS TOM FORD **PHOTOGRAPHY** JONNY FLEETWOOD

Somehow, elements of the car industry have convinced us that cars with the ride quality of tooth enamel on kerbstone are somehow 'sporty', equipped with too hard springs and dampers that don't, that 'fast' is somehow wrapped around a core of discomfort. These two cars dispel that myth in the first 100 metres. Both ride with the kind of fluency and padding that soothes the sharp and gritty edges of UK roads, and then when you reach a quiet stretch, they'll both show heels to all but the most committed of sports cars. They might not be the fastest around a track, but in a battle of wits when it comes to varied road driving, they make most cars look like morons. They are grand tourers – all rounders in the world of fast cars. And they both have eponymous badges. The Bentley Continental GT and the Maserati GranTurismo Folgore.

Aha. One is a plug-in hybrid, the other electric, and therefore not the same. Which they aren't. But as different takes on what makes a good GT, they represent something different – and quite special in their own ways. Of course, a grand tourer is all about compromise, but it's the elegance of the arbitration that differentiates good from bad. You can do big, lumpen distance in a Porsche GT3 RS, but it won't be comfortable and your arse will assume the shape of the carbon bucket seats. Equally, you can fling a Rolls-Royce Phantom about on a mountain pass, but it'll be like helming a 16th century galleon around Cape Wrath. Albeit with a better stereo. What we have here are a pair of beautiful negotiations between comfortable distance/daily travel and brain out speed. Both are two door, four seat (though not necessarily room for four sets of legs) coupes. Both have extraordinary power and torque, luxurious appointments, hefty weight and neither is cheap. They are the same, and yet not.

So let's start with the Bentley. It's the new PHEV V8, the easiest visual cue the fact that it now sports eyeliner around the headlights. It's still got the razored, superformed creases in the bodywork, still got that Bentley face and big bodied look. It's been to a sympathetic plastic surgeon and got some decent facelift work done. That's very Bentley, the evo rather than revo of lutions. But the heavy lifting in this change is mostly under the skin.

The Maserati Folgore also looks like… a GranTurismo. That might sound like damning with faint praise, but it's a car that wears itself so, so well. No pretension, very little to tell that it's electric apart from a couple of badges and some specific wheels. Amazing, given that this is an electric car, whose tricksy engineering allows it to look normal. It comes with V6 or V8 Nettuno

WHAT ABOUT THESE?

PORSCHE TAYCAN S/ AUDI RS E-TRON GT

The German twins. Fastest is Taycan Turbo GT, but the Turbo S is rapid enough. Audi's RS GT a bit softer. Good options both

£164,000/£127,310

ASTON MARTIN DB12

Similar power and speed to our two contenders, good looking, slightly less capable ride. Probably sits somewhere between the two in terms of vibe

£185,000

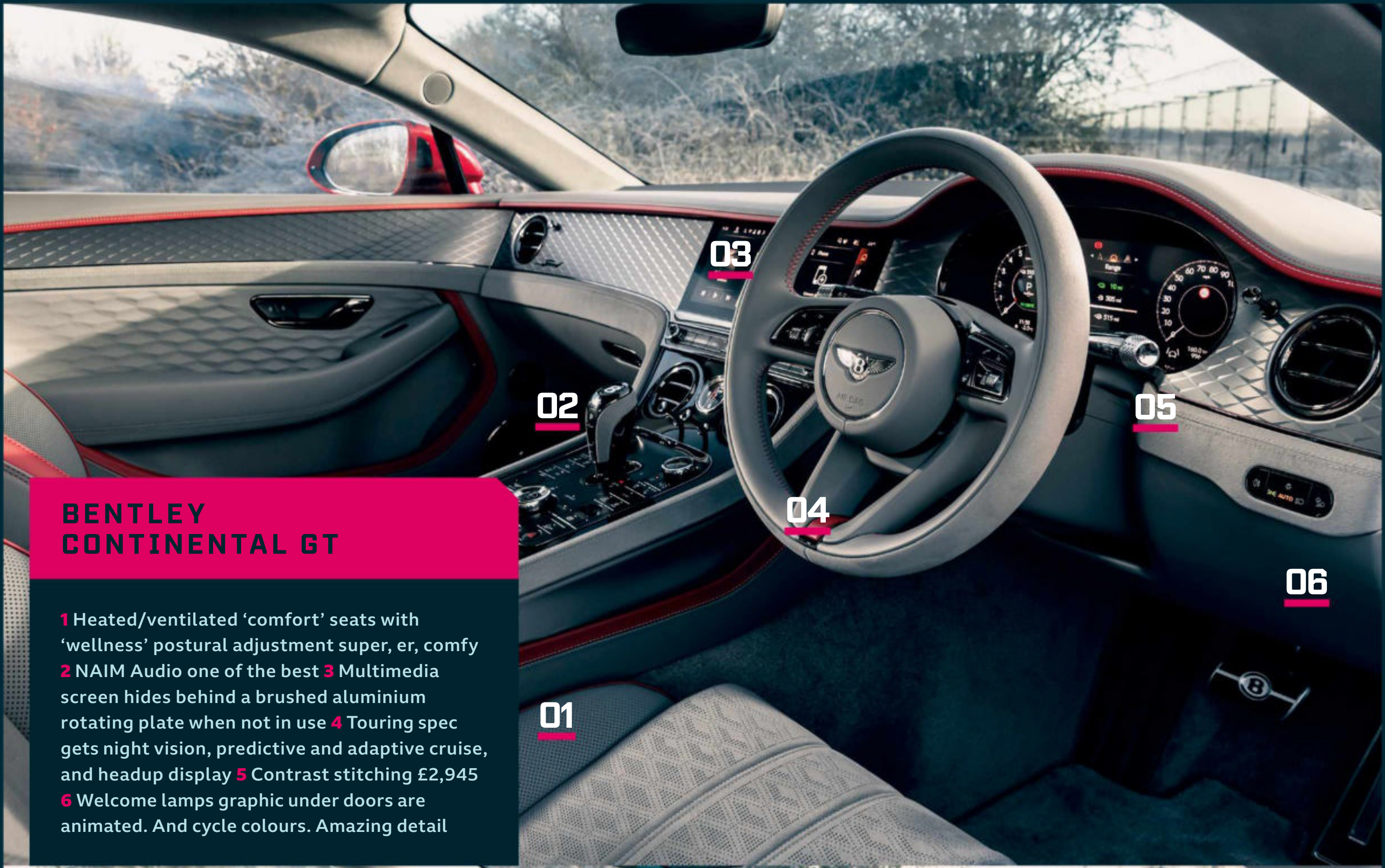
FERRARI PUROSANGUE

Left field one here. Purosangue is a V12 screamer in hiking boots, with the capacity and capability for distance touring. The issue? Well specced it's easily £400k+

£312,845

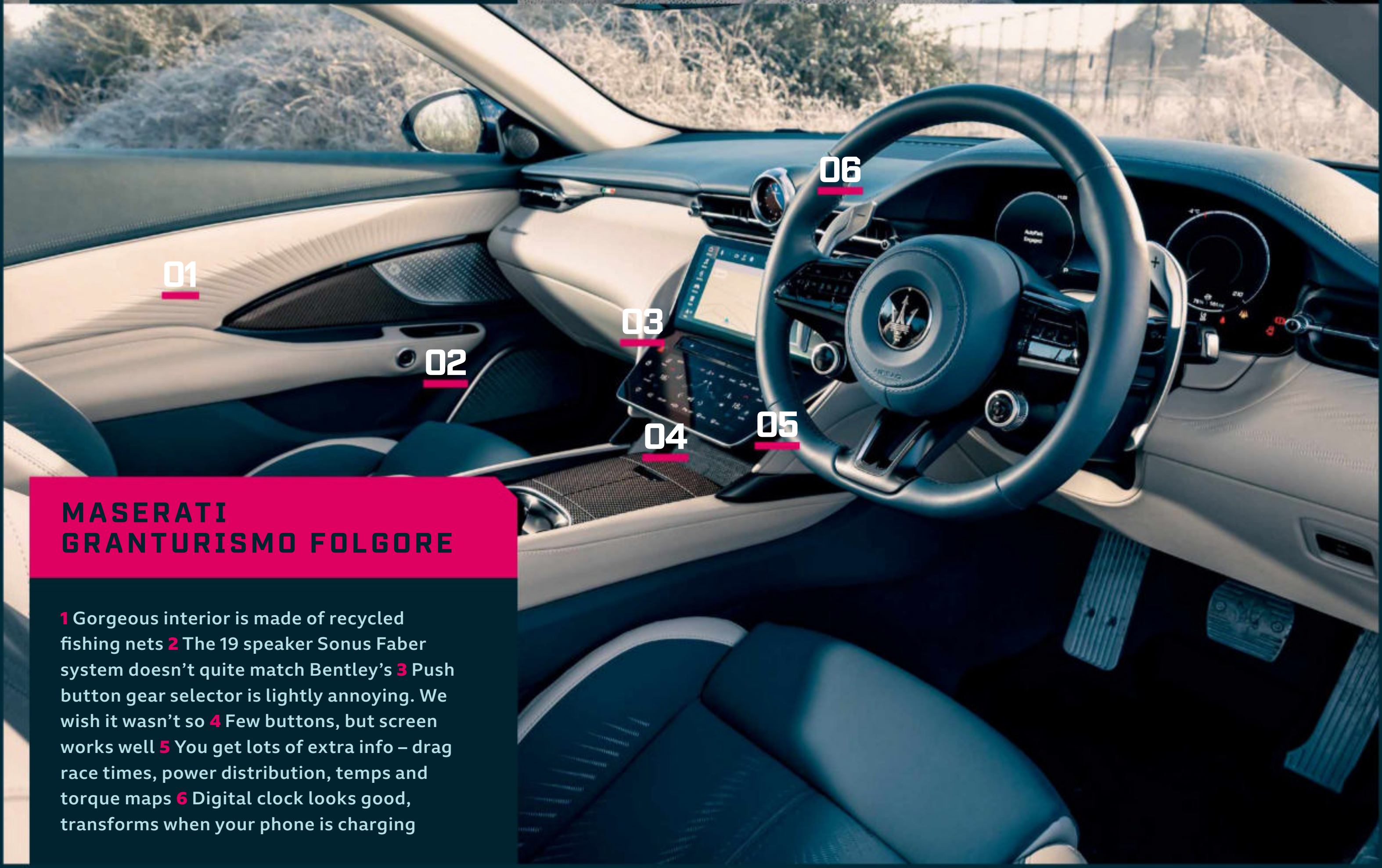
There's one charging plug left down the road, now it's an all out race to the finish

“IN A BATTLE OF WITS WHEN IT COMES TO VARIED ROAD DRIVING, THEY MAKE MOST CARS LOOK LIKE MORONS”



BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT

1 Heated/ventilated ‘comfort’ seats with ‘wellness’ postural adjustment super, er, comfy **2** NAIM Audio one of the best **3** Multimedia screen hides behind a brushed aluminium rotating plate when not in use **4** Touring spec gets night vision, predictive and adaptive cruise, and headup display **5** Contrast stitching £2,945 **6** Welcome lamps graphic under doors are animated. And cycle colours. Amazing detail



MASERATI GRANTURISMO FOLGORE

1 Gorgeous interior is made of recycled fishing nets **2** The 19 speaker Sonus Faber system doesn’t quite match Bentley’s **3** Push button gear selector is lightly annoying. We wish it wasn’t so **4** Few buttons, but screen works well **5** You get lots of extra info – drag race times, power distribution, temps and torque maps **6** Digital clock looks good, transforms when your phone is charging petrol variants, but it's this Folgore EV that's the most interesting. The battery has 83ish kWh of usable power. But it's not sat under the car like most electric vehicles. It's in what Maserati calls a "T bone", that reclines across under the front bulkhead and back into what would be the transmission tunnel in a car with a drivetrain. Thus, you sit 'into' this GranTurismo as you would any other. It stands at 1,353mm tall, low for an EV, 44mm lower than the Continental.

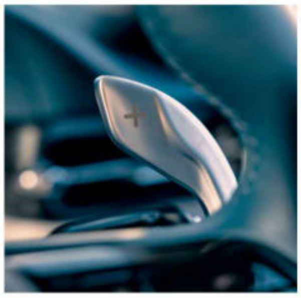
A fact that feeds into the handling balance. It's got 50:50 weight distribution and it's not *that* heavy for an EV at 2,260kg (65 per cent aluminium, but also uses magnesium and high strength steel, a platform designed to be modular and deal with both combustion and electric), but more natural roll centres from which to work. I'm not sure it produces *more* grip than a car with a more usual skateboard style pack, but it's certainly more intuitive. More what we're used to, and therefore more fun. And boy can it be fun. So the roads were a little greasy during the test, if not flat out ice slicked, but 750ish bhp of Corsa mode, instant on electric torque and nearly 1,000lb ft of torque spins the rear wheels at 70mph if you're slapping the throttle and you've slept the traction control. It isn't, however, as manic as it sounds. With three motors, this car is actually all wheel drive, even if it feels mostly rear. But that front motor can pull the car straight with 395bhp if it feels the need, thanks to clever maths and digital reaction times.

So the Folgore can actually dispense horsepower as it sees fit. You can put the whole 750bhp down through just the rear axle, or up to 395bhp through a single rear wheel or the front motor, should some bizarre grip situation present itself. And with three motors, there's opportunity to torque vector with more precision than just a single motor on each axle – you can literally get the car to turn harder, understeer less, balance the pitch and yaw. Get it wrong and it feels fake and disconnected. Get it right, and the car feels planted, secure and bizarrely grippy – especially at the front. Maserati has got it right. Yes, it gets a bit spicy when the ESP is slackened right off, and yes, the front will always try and pull itself straight eventually, but generally this feels more like a 911 Turbo than a GranTurismo. And that's some high praise.

The Bentley, on the other hand, will immediately feel too soft when cruising. Relaxing as a warm bath and a Valium, yes, with Rolls levels of comfort. Something with this amount of compliance and squish can't really perform when things get twisty. But when you stick it in Sport and heave the system power to everything on, it transforms. The steering might be a teeny bit slow, but accurate, the body control – so languid before – pretty good for such a big car. It always feels more four square, more all wheel drive than the Maserati, but flick it into a turn (and yes, I would describe it as a flick) and the car will attack an apex, spearing out the other side with a dash of power on oversteer. Jekyll, meet Hyde. And where the Folgore is quicker and more direct pretty much everywhere, there's a glorious relentlessness to the Continental. The way the V8 kicks in like a distant thunderclap, the way it bullies the bejeezus out of a series of bends, the way it masks its weight when braking and transitioning. Geologically solid at speed. This feels like a Continental, looks like a Continental, but it's got more chops than it ever had. It eclipses the last gen W12 by some margin, in all areas apart from literal numbers of cylinders. It even has a decent turning circle thanks to all wheel steer. It's a revelation in Candy Red paint.

Both, it has to be said, are fast enough. The Bentley manages 3.2 seconds to 62mph and rumbles on to 208mph. It'll do it, too, faintly ridiculous as it is to see a Bentley just headbutting the horizon with a flare of wheelspin. The Folgore

ITS ALL IN THE DETAILS



05
EV POWER
Fast Clean Energy

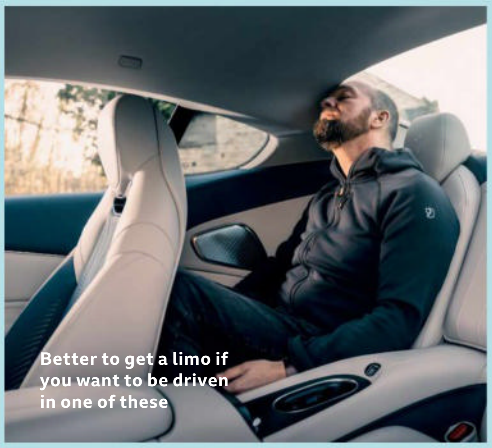
1 With a home charger, you're looking at 50 miles from the B's 25.9kWh battery **2** Boot is only 260 litres – the Maserati has 10 more. Blame the battery pack **3** Big 22in 'Ten Swept' wheels defy the ride quality. It's a mattress of a cruiser. Carbon ceramics are £14,115 **4** 3D carbon fibre with copper thread in the trim is classy and interesting **5** Charge flap is knee height and easy to miss and walk into

SPECIFICATIONS

	WINNER **BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT**	**MASERATI GRANTURISMO FOLGORE**	**TESTER'S NOTES**
PRICE	£236,000 OTR (£296,000 as tested)	£179,950 OTR (£195,430 as tested)	
POWERTRAIN	3996cc TT V8 plus e-motor, 25.9kWh	Three e-motors, 92.5kWh	*Maserati has tri motor (one front, two rear) drivetrain, but always feels more RWD. Bentley feels more four square in all conditions*
TRANSMISSION	8spd DCT, AWD	1spd auto, AWD	*Bentley bleeds electric and V8 power pretty much seamlessly with 8spd box. Folgore is single speed and literally seamless*
TOTAL POWER	771bhp	750bhp	*A stonking 750ish bhp for the Maserati, but each motor is capable of 395bhp – so there's room here for a faster GranTurismo (ie 1,200ish bhp) if you need to rearrange your own face*
TOTAL TORQUE	738lb ft	996lb ft	*The Bentley ain't a pushover, but just under 1,000lb ft of torque really makes itself felt in the midrange on the Folgore. It's an overtaking weapon of mass destruction*
0-62mph	3.2secs	2.7secs	*At 3.2 seconds to 62mph the Bentley isn't slow, but the Folgore is half a second quicker – and it'll do it without fuss as long as it has a dry surface. That's very quick*
TOP SPEED	208mph	201mph	*Electric cars don't tend to bother with top speeds much, but the Maserati will top 200mph. The Continental is faster at 208, but that's just bragging rights*
CLAIMED ECONOMY/ RANGE, TAILPIPE CO_2	27.4mpg/50 mile e-range, 29g/km	3.3mpkWh/ 279 miles	*The Bentley really shines if you want to attack tax and still have a V8. Charge it up enough and 29g/km will work. The 50 mile electric range is plenty for local trips*
WEIGHT	2,459kg	2,260kg	*Bentley feels more nimble the faster you go, Folgore always feels relatively light. The torque vectoring really helps the electric car's balance*
BOOTSPACE	260 litres	270 litres	*Surprisingly, the Maserati has the bigger boot at 270 litres. And the Bentley's 260 litre boot has to hold the charging cables. Boo*
VERDICT	*Exceptional grand tourer that has an almost heirloom quality*	*Fantastic electric sports four seater that bodes well for future Maserati EVs*	
SCORE	9	9	/10

is half a second quicker than that, and can make passengers feel lightly ill. You think the Bentley's brilliant meld of battery, V8 and eight speed box is sublime, but the GranTurismo is literally one speed seamless and if power corrupts, then this much torque corrupts absolutely. There is no overtaking opportunity marginal enough not to be made safe by the mid range. It'll hit 201mph and the benchmark 62mph from rest in 2.7secs. That's not just quick, it's blazing.

But the good news isn't just the looks and the performance, because both feel resolutely special inside. The Maserati blurs the line between old and new school, laser cut recycled fabrics, copper woven carbon fibre elements, new digital displays and that low slung seating position. It looks lovely, and feels like a stepchange for the company. But the interior – pretty though it is – doesn't quite hit the heights when you dig deeper. There's a lightness to the volumes that doesn't give the granite feel you get from the flying B, and the push button gear selector doesn't suit it. Whoever approved the indicator noise that sounds like an old carriage clock needs to have a word, too. Small things, but when the rest of the car is so sorted, it matters. It doesn't help that the Bentley has an almost heirloom quality to it that's impossible to ignore. You'd spec a Continental to your preferred taste and then… just keep it. It's got a heft and density, and even though the interior isn't much changed from the previous version, it's still a useful, intuitive place. It's not all gravy though – both have surprisingly small boots, and even though the rear seats in the Bentley have more headroom than the Maserati, neither are places you want to spend time as an adult.


Better to get a limo if you want to be driven in one of these

So what's the verdict on these two very different grand tourers? Well, one elephant in the room is the very idea of touring. And it comes down to range. We can safely ignore the optimistic 279 miles of official WLTP nonsense, but in the freezing cold and with some chunky right hand footwork, the Folgore delivered 1.9mpkWh. That's about 160 miles. Which isn't enough for genuine ease of use on a long trip, since you can't arrive at a charger with zero per cent. The Bentley, for reference, has an 80 litre fuel tank and a 50 mile battery. So you're looking at 534 miles of convenience all told (less if you clog it, obviously), albeit with £125ish fill up with super. On my home charger, the Folgore cost (at peak), £7.43 to fill for, say, a real 240 miles if you're pottering. That's… worth contemplating, no matter your disposable.

What that means is that the Bentley feels like the better fit when it comes down to being more of a grand tourer. Ease of use, a tastefully dichotomous personality. It's absolutely brilliant at being the best Bentley GT it can be, and that's a very good car indeed. The mix of sporting ability and laidback comfort (helped by that EV support) intensely satisfying, the compromises we mentioned judged to perfection. It really is that good. But the Maserati GranTurismo Folgore is also exceptional in that it has managed to reframe what a GranTurismo actually is, in terms of the Maserati model, rather than the type of car. It's fast, fun, sober and stylish – grown up and electric, in a way that entirely suits the brand. And there's room for more – the installed motors are capable of 1,200bhp, so a Trofeo Corsa or 'Furioso' variant would tempt. It's more of a daily than a sports car – and the better for it – but not quite an electric GT. Yet. So it's a Bentley win this time, by a genteel, steel coated whisker.

R44 BML
M900 FOL

"THE BENTLEY FEELS LIKE THE BETTER FIT WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO BEING MORE OF A GRAND TOURER"

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THE OVERRUN

Small but perfectly formed reviews. The best of this month's drives

8/10

FIAT GRANDE PANDA

£20,975

44 kWh	111 bhp	0–62mph 11.0 secs	vmax 82 mph	199 miles

BARRING A FEW SQUARE centimetres of switches, the Grande Panda looks entirely different to the Citroen below. But it uses the same platform and EV drive. Does that matter? Not really. The Grande Panda is a proper supermini, unlike the tiny Pandas of old. You can have electric with a 150 mile real world range, or petrol with a mild hybrid DCT auto box. Both work smoothly and efficiently. It rides well, corners cheerily and has competitive space. So there's no reason to avoid. And two compelling reasons to go for it. One, it's very cheap. Two, the delightful design, in and out. **PH**

CITROEN e-C3 AIRCROSS

£22,990

44 kWh	111 bhp	0–62mph 12.9 secs	vmax 89 mph	188 miles

THE PANDA MAY HAVE 'GRANDE' in its name, but if you really want to stretch those Stellantis supermini underpinnings then this C3 Aircross is what you need. It's essentially an embiggened C3 with greater headroom, more bootspace and even an optional third row of seats (petrol or hybrid versions only). The extra weight and general surface area do drop the claimed range slightly, but Citroen doesn't share its fancy hydraulic bump stops with its Italian friends, so the C3 Aircross's party piece is its impressive ride quality. Slightly lacking in character, though. **GP**

7/10

GBS ZERO

£41,860

FOR Approachable, more relaxed than a Caterham

AGAINST Wobbly fit and finish, stiff as a board

WELL SPOTTED, THIS *ISN'T* A CATERHAM. IT'S A GBS – CHAMPION OF DIY shed builds for almost 20 years. Its hot take on the Seven is the Zero: longer, wider and roomier, with a full spaceframe chassis, flat steel floor and independent double wishbones front and back. The engine is inched rearwards for 50:50 weight distribution. GBS makes most of its own stuff too – even the adjustable dampers. Bonded panels boost stiffness, but at speed that means you get pushed around on all but perfect roads. By which point the heavy steering gets eerily light. You'll forgive that because the suspension soaks up jolts with ease, and combined with that friendly 2.5 and less claustrophobic cabin, the Zero is an agreeable thing. If you're not fussed about all out performance and don't want to queue for a Caterham, this is a solid alternative. **JH**

2.5T 4cyl	210 bhp	4.0+ secs	n/a mpg	n/a g/km

9713 MPN
8/10

CUPRA LEON 300

£42,130

THIS FACELIFTED LEON 300 gets the familiar EA888 2.0-litre turbo and FWD, so it's essentially a Golf GTI Clubsport that speaks Spanish and costs £600 less. You can only have a dual clutch auto, and the engine struggles to put all of its power down. A trick front diff helps tuck the nose into corners and adaptive suspension means it's comfortable. It isn't quite as precise as a Civic Type R, or as mad as an i30N though. **GP**

2.0T 4cyl	296 bhp	5.7 secs	37.3 mpg	173 g/km

ACEMAN S
YE74 NKH
6/10

MINI ACEMAN SE EXCLUSIVE

£41,600

BE AFRAID, FOR MINI HAS LAID a cunning trap at its dealerships. In you go for a Cooper Electric, but wait! The boot is tiny. And it's only a 3dr. "Well," murmurs the dealer, "there's always... the Aceman." It's roomier, easier to get into, and that touchscreen is mesmerising... Without warning you've been ensnared by a not as sweet, less rangey and just as firm riding crossover. Stay safe out there, folks. **JH**

49.2 kWh	215 bhp	7.1 secs	105 mph	244 miles

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5/10

NISSAN ARIYA NISMO

£56,620

FOR You can brag to your friends that you've got a Nismo

AGAINST The awkward silence when you tell them it's an Ariya Nismo

87 kWh	429 bhp	5.0 secs	124 mph	261 miles

AT LONG LAST, WE'VE GOT A NEW NISMO badged car in the UK. The first of many, we're led to believe, with Nissan planning on 15 battery electric cars on sale by 2030, and sporty versions of several of them in the pipeline. The first is this, the Nissan Ariya Nismo.

So, it's based on an existing electric crossover. It's not the first 'sporty' electric crossover we've seen of course, though Nissan says this is *not* – repeat *not* – a direct rival to the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N and Kia EV6 GT. Instead, it's got the Ioniq 5 N-*Line* and EV6 GT-*Line*, plus the likes of the Volkswagen ID.4 and ID.5 GTX in its crosshairs.

There's no shying away from the sportier aesthetic, including a new front splitter, ducktail spoiler, twin diffuser, 20in Enkei alloy wheels and a Formula E inspired rear fog lamp. Like people needed a reason to drive around everywhere with their fogs on. Inside you get new Nismo gauges, a red start button on a new blackened wood dashboard, red ambient lighting and red stitching on the steering wheel, seats and door cards.

Underneath it gets the dual motor Ariya's e4ORCE setup, but power is up to 429bhp, an increase of 128bhp. Torque remains the same at 443lb ft, but it gets a new 40:60 rear bias, while zero to 62mph is seen off in 5.0secs, down 0.7secs over the regular dual motor version.

The steering and suspension have also been retuned, with a new front stabiliser bar and stiffer springs (by three per cent at the front, 10 at the rear). The brakes remain standard, though there is recalibrated ABS, which in combination with the grippier but range reducing Michelin Pilot Sport EV tyres (you're down to a claimed 261 miles here, versus 330 miles in the base model) shortens stopping distance by eight per cent.

Not much to write home about, on the face of it. And so it proves. It doesn't feel noticeably quicker than the regular dual motor Ariya, even in Nismo mode, which it needs to be in to unlock maximum power and the rear bias delivery. Nor does it offer any more dynamic engagement (or any more faux noise), so it's no more rewarding to drive.

And the ride – already quite firm on the standard car – is simply too harsh for a family crossover. It grips gamely round fast flowing bends, aided by the torque vectoring system, though it is prone to wheelspin and you're quickly reminded that it's a 2.2 tonne behemoth when you throw it into a corner with too much gusto. At which point not upgrading the brakes feels like an oversight.

Honestly? It feels a rather half hearted effort. Nismo-*Line* might have been more apt. Little wonder Nissan was at pains to point out it's not an Ioniq 5 N rival. Just stick with the regular Ariya e-4ORCE Advance, which already gets the torque vectoring system, around 20 per cent extra range and asks for nearly £6k less in change. **PR**

JAECOO 7 LUXURY 1.5 SUPER HYBRID SYSTEM

£35,065

1.5T 4cyl + e-motor	201 bhp	8.5 secs	403 mpg	23 g/km

A JAECOO IS THE POSH SUB BRAND OF OMADA... the SUV line from Chery... China's fourth biggest carmaker. Shifts more metal than BMW. The name? A fusion of the German word for 'hunter', and 'cool'. Seriously. It's glued in XXL font to the grille of a not very interesting crossover SUV. The most forgettable device since that laser pen from *Men in Black*. Big hybrid range, big legroom and a huge kit list for Skoda money has to work hard to offset the invisible badge kudos... for now. **OK**

AUDI RS Q8

£122,280

4.0TT V8	592 bhp	3.8 secs	21.7 mpg	295 g/km

THE FACELIFTED AUDI RS Q8 IS TRULY ALL the car you could ever need, but also all the car you definitely don't need. In regular guise, as tested here, it's a facewobblingly fast experience, thanks of course to its standard 592bhp V8 powerplant. No two ways about it – this car is magnificent. But the more we drove it, the more we wondered whether an RS Q8 buyer might find the better looking, almost as powerful and slighter cheaper RS6 a better choice... **PR**

KGM ACTYON

£36,995

FOR Reasonably quiet, spacious, looks like it'll back you up in a scrap

AGAINST Dreadful economy, dynamically limited, a lot of money

1.5T 4cyl	161 bhp	10.8 secs	33.1 mpg	194 g/km

SSANGYONG HAS, ER, LEVELLED UP. THE South Korean carmaker changed hands a couple of years ago and no sooner had the ink dried on the paperwork, the new owners hastily rebranded. Why? According to the *Korean Herald*, even the chairman had to concede SsangYong had "a painful image". Ouch.

So how'd they settle on KGM? After flirting with financial ruin when former custodian Mahindra decided to cut ties, SsangYong was eventually picked up by KG Group, a South Korean conglomerate that trades in chemicals, steel, fintech... whatever that is. But not cars. KG Motor is its spangly new mobility division.

The Actyon is the first new car under the KGM flag. You can think of it as a mildly coupefied version of the boxy Torres SUV, which means it sits above the smaller Korando and Tivoli but in the shadow of the mammoth seven seat Rexton. But it's the Musso pickup – the only one to break four figures in UK sales last year – that's the top seller. We'd honestly forgotten the lineup was this broad, and there's more metal coming too. Sheesh.

KGM doesn't plan to meddle with the classic SsangYong schtick – an affordable, left field haven for those shunning the mainstream. And yet... the Actyon reaches the UK in full Dalai Lama 'one with everything' spec. Nappa leather, huge touchscreen, heated rear bench, the lot. Very odd.

Power comes from a 1.5-litre petrol, marshalled by a six speed auto box. Sounds reasonable, is actually terrible. Prod the throttle out of a junction and you'll spin the front wheels – press it more and it'll shrug, kick down, and balloon the revs like a horrid CVT. We got 20mpg out of it. Not good.

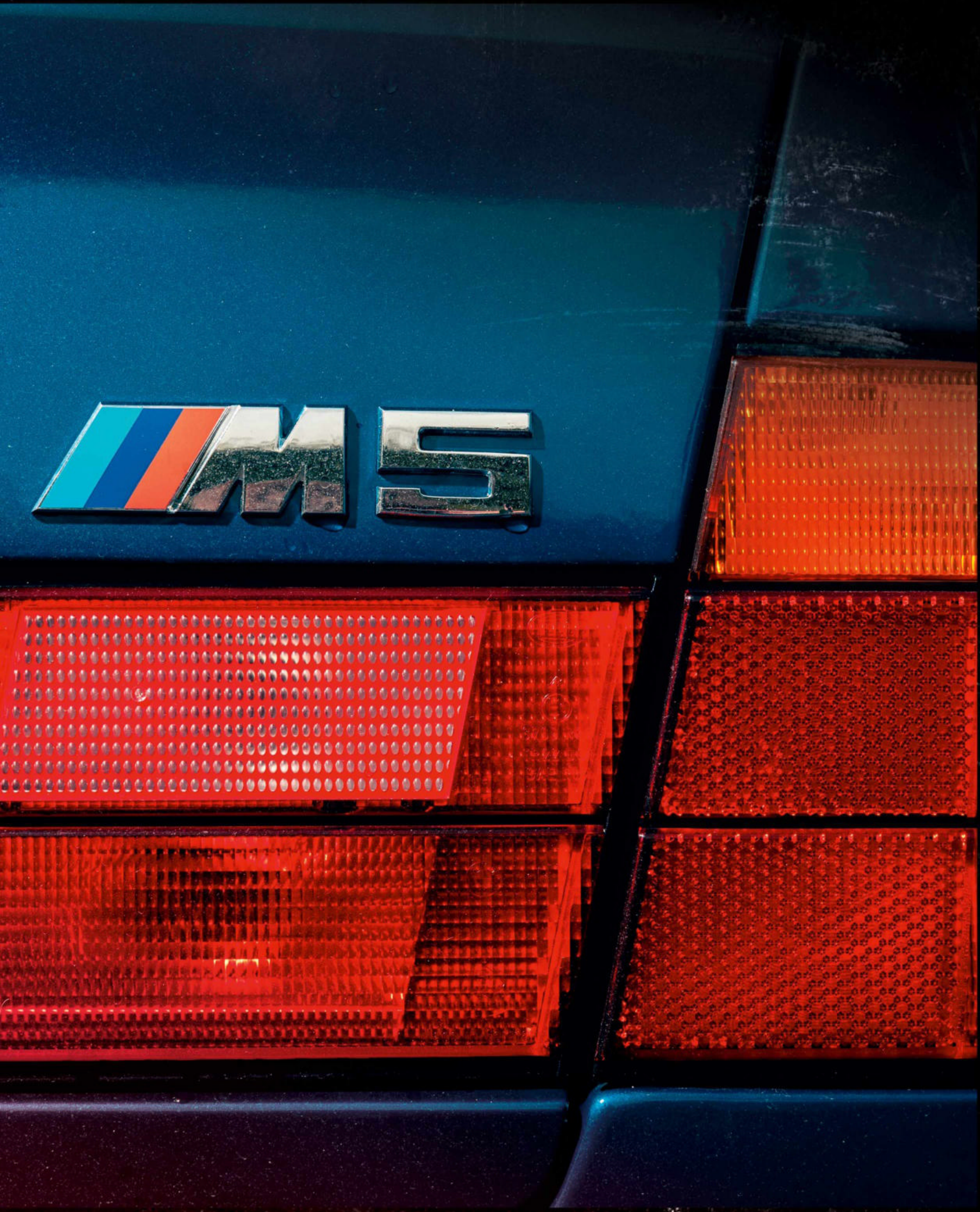
The wheels and steering have no sense of connection, and the dead travel off centre means you have to tug it round corners rather than sweep through them. Roll isn't too bad, but the ride is overly rigid. Beware potholes.

Any redeeming features? Um... it's fairly quiet, it's very roomy and there's no arguing with the kit list. Cabin quality has improved from SsangYong's shoddy peak. But it's slim pickings. And in asking 37 big ones for it, KGM has ensured most of its better driving rivals are also cheaper. Oops. **JH**

GARAGE

INCLUDING

BMW i5 TOURING · GENESIS GV60 · PEUGEOT 3008 · INEOS GRENADIER · SKODA KODIAQ · RICCI'S GARAGE · LAND ROVER DEFENDER 130 · MINI COOPER S · PROJECT CORNER: BMW E30


M5

YC24 BRV
J129 XDP
BMW M Power

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REPORT 6

BMW i5 TOURING

£79,355 OTR/£93,395 as tested/£1,274 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:

Is an XXL dad wagon still a versatility king when it's electric?

DRIVER: ANDY FRANKLIN

WHEN THE BMW E34 M5 WAS launched in 1992 it was claimed this world beating super saloon could get from 0–62mph in around six seconds. That's the same time as our single motor, boggo spec i5 Touring. In essence, a 'basic' 5-Series is now as fast as an old M5.

For that we can thank batteries and motors – there's got to be something to say for them, right? The E34 was also the grandaddy of M5 Touring versions, sadly for these pages we couldn't get the Touring – turns out they are pretty rare with just 891 examples built. But this beautifully maintained saloon from BMW's heritage fleet is as smart as you'll find one of these today.

The remarkable thing about the E34 and the current 5-Series to me is the DNA is still evident between them. Those comfy laid back stylish seats, the gadgets, its spacious boot, the choice of upmarket materials inside, the beautifully rich blue paintwork, and the oddly not quite enough space for three adults in the back, the latter being quite significant because over time the 5-Series has grown in length.

The E34 measures in at 4.7m while the new i5 comes in at 5m long. That's a whole school ruler bigger and yet the back seats still don't quite feel roomy enough.

It *feels* long too. I often find it hard to get round tight corners and into parking spaces in the i5, and coupled with its poor turning circle it can be a bit of juggle around town despite rear steer. And while the E34 had its own difficulties around town, mainly due to the older heavier steering at low speeds, it was on the open road the E34 really did prove where its DNA lies, with brilliant feedback from the overly large steering wheel and the soft as you like suspension soaking up any lumps and bumps. Surprisingly very little body roll either.

The 3.6-litre straight six has a smooth delivery but after the i5, you notice the heavy throttle accompanying it and the rubbery feel from the gearstick. There's a lot of engine braking too, which felt very similar to how regen works in the i5, ironically.

What's even more ironic is I had fuel anxiety, failing to remember that old car fuel gauges can be notoriously unreliable and vary even on hills. I was getting perilously close to the reserve, panicking it might run out. My rose tinted gaze had failed to recall that part, though obviously finding fuel stations today is easier than charging. But I couldn't help laughing at my momentary panic.

In reality, living with an older car for a few days does make you realise how brilliant cars are but also how far they have moved on. BMW has kept the basics consistent throughout its history and not messed with the formula, which might explain why the i5 drives and feels like a proper BMW – just one without an engine.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 2956cc twin turbo V6 petrol, 4WD
PERFORMANCE: 289bhp, 362lb ft, 0–62mph in 7.9secs, 111mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,454kg
ECONOMY: 20.5mpg, 315g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 6,329 **OUR MPG** 19.5

REPORT 4

VOLKSWAGEN ID.7

£51,550 OTR/£52,030 as tested/£478 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: To discover if VW has actually mastered electrification

DRIVER: JASON BARLOW

IN THE FIVE MONTHS I'VE HAD THE ID7, I'VE ONLY had to use a public charger *twice*.

My electricity provider offers what it calls a 'Next Drive EV' tariff. That means I'm paying 6.7p per kWh if/when I charge the car between midnight and 7am. (The national average varies according to region but is around 24.9p per kWh.) That's with E.ON, which is currently offering the most competitive rate. British Gas is offering a two rate tariff that costs 7.9p per kWh between midnight and 5am, Octopus is 7p per mile, and EDF 9p per mile. In order to qualify for any of these, you need a smart meter.

And a patient demeanour, because working through all the possibilities is time consuming. You've also got to remember to compare the daytime/peak rate of the EV tariff, which'll invariably be higher. But then you compare it to the cost of charging on a public network. For example, BP Pulse charges 59p per kWh on a 7kW charger (paid contactless), rising to 85p if you use a 50kW rapid charger. According to Zapmap, the weighted average PAYG price to charge on the UK public charging network in December 2024 was 53p per kWh on a slow/fast charger and 80p/kWh on a rapid/ultra rapid setup.

I tend to charge the car once every three days, almost always overnight. Maths was never my forte and getting on top of all this has given me a headache. But in terms of pure energy costs, a domestic wall box is clearly the way to go. And E.ON says its electricity is generated using 100 per cent renewable sources.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: single electric motor, 77kWh battery, RWD
PERFORMANCE: 282bhp, 402lb ft, 0-62mph in 6.5secs, 112mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,172kg
ECONOMY: 4.7mpkWh, 383 miles

MILES SO FAR 10,299 **OUR MPKWH** 3.1

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REPORT 5

VAUXHALL ASTRA GSe TOURING

£44,000 OTR/£44,500 as tested/£374 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: The VXR badge is dead, now we've got GSE. What's it all about?

DRIVER: *VIJAY PATTNI*

IN 2025, THIS IS AS POINTY AS performance Astras get. After months of living with this one, we're not sure it really has a performance personality.

Largely because the drivetrain isn't that appealing. A reminder: there's a 1.6-litre 4cyl petrol engine producing 176bhp, matched to an electric motor drawing power from a 12.4kWh battery. All in, it makes 223bhp and Vauxhall claims 0–62mph in 7.5secs.

It sounds fine. But it's not… Sure, with the battery suitably topped up, it's reasonably punchy off the line, smooth and refined. The transition from electric to petrol is fairly smooth most of the time, and you can make nice, sedate progress.

But the gearbox is too slow, if you run out of e-juice (and to my shame, I've not been refilling as often as I should, hence the dip in mpg) the engine sounds quite coarse and rough. There's regen, but the level of force required varies, and that's really quite annoying. And there's no steering feel.

It's a shame, because the Astra could otherwise have made a really good case for itself. We've said it loads but it bears repeating: it looks good, is comfortable, sensible and refined. But there's just not enough of a wild side.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1598cc turbo 4cyl + e-motor, FWD
PERFORMANCE: 223bhp, 265lb ft, 0–62mph in 7.5secs, 146mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,746kg
ECONOMY: 256mpg, 25g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 7,979 OUR MPG 35.7

DACIA DUSTER

Clip on the Car Bar, and suddenly your Duster's boot is the finest Alpine cafe in the car park

YouClip cupholder keeps coffee steady, so you can concentrate on not setting fire to your fondue

Muddy boots? Bring it on. The Duster's rubber mats can handle adventure

The 12V socket in the boot is perfect for charging your phone while waiting for your cheese to finally melt

REPORT 2

DACIA DUSTER

£25,945/£26,595/£128

WHY IT'S HERE: The Duster now looks funky and has gone hybrid: still a budget hero?

DRIVER: *CHARLIE ROSE*

A RECENT SURVEY SAYS BRITS lose their sense of adventure by 36. I'm 31, so I've got five years left before I become boring. Cue Dacia's *Everyday Adventure Guide*. Dacia reckons we should fight back by embracing small, local, affordable adventures.

I decided to take up one of Dacia's suggested adventures, which is why, on a cold winter's day, I found myself eating cheese fondue out of a car boot.

Inspired by the Duster's ruggedness and the fact that it's quite nippy this time of year, I decided an Alpine style picnic would be a perfect adventure. The Duster was loaded up with cheese, baguettes, cornichons and an assortment of pastries.

Was it life changing? No. But it was fun, and it turned an ordinary day into something different. And the Duster managed fine, because it's easier to take a car on a picnic than a table.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1598cc turbo 4cyl, FWD
PERFORMANCE: 139bhp, 109lb ft, 0–62mph in 9.8secs, 106mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,380kg
ECONOMY: 56.5mpg, 114g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 2,850 OUR MPG 54.1

HELLO

“The new M135 has to deliver on that theoretical promise”

BMW M135

£43,740 OTR/£54,050 as tested/£602 pcm
WHY IT’S HERE: It’s about time BMW had a hot hatch worthy of the M badge again
DRIVER: JETHRO BOVINGDON

WHEN I LOOK AT THE M135 XDRIVE on paper, my heart thumps harder. It’s a compact hatchback with a 2.0-litre turbocharged 4cyl engine producing 300bhp and 295lb ft. It has the impossible allure of BMW’s ‘M’ badging and, with 4WD, the potential to offer traditional hot hatch sharpness with a bit of rear biased dynamic fun when you get stuck in. It even looks good for a modern BMW.

That’s a lot of boxes ticked, isn’t it? Throw in the cliched (but correct) view that hot hatches are perfectly aligned to our craggy, narrow roads in the UK and the M135 starts to sound deeply appealing. Even at a basic price of £43,740. That sort of money blows my mind, but we live in a world where a Civic Type R costs £50,050. For reference the M135 is just a shade cheaper than a Golf R.

Of course, that’s just for starters. Our rather delicious Frozen Portimao Blue car complete with M Sport Package Pro, the Technology pack, full panoramic glass roof and all sorts of other (unnecessary) things is a whopping £54,050. Anyway, cars are expensive, this is not new information. But, such is the outlay that the experience better be pretty bloody good. It has to deliver on that theoretical promise…

My colleagues suggest the M135 may struggle. It was thrown into the hot hatch supertest and was damned with damning criticism. The BMW wasn’t particularly fast on track, didn’t possess much in the way of feel and an Audi had better balance. An Audi! Not long ago this would be unthinkable. My new car didn’t make the final five. The ignominy.

Yet, I remain hopeful. At this moment I have driven it precisely 68 miles. All but five of which have been on a motorway. The interior is pretty lovely. It feels quality. The old M135i’s auto box has been replaced by a dual clutch 7spd unit that’s waaaay nicer. Overall it feels a lot more together than the last car. Now to uncover the hot hatch thrills. Fingers crossed.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1998cc turbo 4cyl, 4WD
PERFORMANCE: 296bhp, 295lb ft, 0–62mph in 4.9secs, 155mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,550kg
ECONOMY: 36.7mpg, 175g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 3,476 **OUR MPG** 36.9

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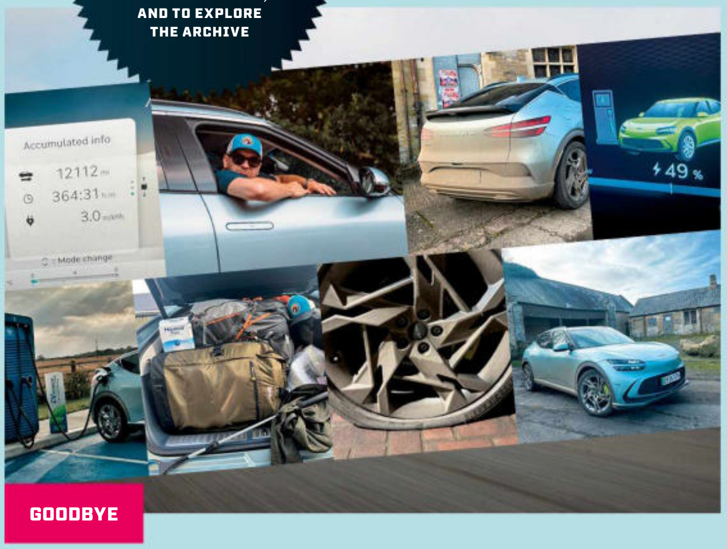


GOODBYE

GENESIS GV60

£66,900 OTR/£74,855 as tested/£985 pcm
WHY IT'S HERE: Time to see if Genesis' only bespoke EV cuts the electric mustard
DRIVER: *Tom Ford*

SO THAT'S THAT – 12,112 MILES, 364 and a half hours at the wheel at an average of 3.0mpkWh, some 4,037kWh of power through the cells. And you know what? I've enjoyed it. The basics are that there haven't been any issues in terms of operation, nothing's fallen off or broken, the interior looks like new and the GV60 has generally been a good car.

One of the big plus points has been the platform's 800V charging architecture, stuffing in as many kW as the charge point can provide. More interestingly, when it gets 75 per cent plus full, it'll still haul away at 45-ish kW, meaning if you really do want to fill the car right up you can, without waiting ages. A typical 30–40 per cent top up on the usual kinds of variable output chargers took 15–20mins. Perfectly acceptable.

So what's the verdict? Well, it's another of those cars that's really very good, but you appreciate in a slightly detached manner. The ownership and care prospect looks sound, the product solid. But there's a price premium here that needs a more tangible USP to get you to make that jump, and I don't think the GV60 manages it. I've enjoyed driving it, and it's a car that could swing your brain for a points victory, but I'm not sure it'll win your heart.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: dual electric motors, 77kWh battery, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 483bhp, 516lb ft, 0–62mph in 4.1secs, 146mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,145kg
ECONOMY: 3.2mpkWh, 289 miles

MILES SO FAR 12,112 OUR MPKWH 3.0

REPORT 5

SKODA KODIAQ PHEV

£44,635 OTR/£47,960 as tested/£516 pcm
WHY IT'S HERE: All the car your family will ever need – but will you want for more?
DRIVER: *Ben Pulman*

HOW DOES THE SKODA KODIAQ COMPARE TO THE UK'S most popular SUV, the Kia Sportage? I'll leave cost aside (as the Skoda's list price is a little dearer but lease deals put it three figures cheaper per month) but let's rattle through the rest.

DESIGN I'll give it to the striking Sportage, the MkII Kodiaq looks a little awkward: the tracks don't look wide enough and the wheelarches are a funny shape.

DRIVING The Kia initially feels more agile, and the four wheel drive system prohibits any of the Skoda's FWD wheelspinning hooliganism, but the latter has a calmer and better insulated ride. Draw.

SPACE A win for the Skoda. It's physically bigger and trumps the Kia resolutely on boot and back seat space. It's ahead up front, too – it's got flatter seats and a skinnier transmission tunnel, but I'm a big man, so I fit in the Skoda while I feel squeezed in the Kia.

INFOTAINMENT The Kia has the better stereo, but the wired Apple/Android connectivity is unreliable (as on every car) and the touchscreen is positioned too low, with the landscape layout meaning too much scrolling up and down versus the (wireless) Skoda.

VERDICT Would I rather stick with the Skoda or swap to the Kia? I'm happy (stretching out) where I am.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 5,1498cc 4cyl turbo petrol + e-motor and 25.7kWh battery, 6spd auto, FWD
PERFORMANCE: 201bhp, 258lb ft, 0-62mph in 8.4secs, 130mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,977kg
ECONOMY: 565mpg, 11g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 6,309 OUR MPG 224.6

Ricci's GARAGE

REPORT 56

THIS MONTH: WILL IT BE LUCKY NUMBER FIVE FOR MARK'S GT-R ENGINE REBUILD?

Blow an engine up once, shame on you. Blow an engine up twice, shame on me. Blow an engine up four times? You've passed Level 3 Skyline GT-R ownership.

Why the other rebuilds? The reason for that lies firmly in two key areas – first is the useless specialists who previously worked on the car, and second, it's the unpopular fact that RB26 engines aren't as good as the internet thinks. Not unless you're prepared to overhaul every weakness at great expense.

Fair to say I have been known to run the engine at more than double its power, but if you look at what some of the Aussie and New Zealand builders are achieving now, it's genuinely possible to have a 'reliable' RB engine with double or triple the horsepower. They've even pushed them to stratospheric levels in excess of 1,800bhp. This is a near 40-year-old engine design after all, which first appeared in RB26 form back in 1989 with the R32 GT-R. And even in 2025 tuners all around the world are still developing upgrades, thanks in part to their increased values and collectability.

This is something I'm very aware of, as my R34 GT-R 'refresh' is completely out of hand now. Nothing original is being reused – there's new glass from Nissan, a new wiring loom and new upholstery for the interior. But that also means I'm past the point of being able to cut corners, which is why my fifth and final engine – and I really do mean final engine – is on a pallet in Australia waiting to be shipped here. Dahtone Racing is one of Australia's most revered RB specialists, building some of the fastest and highest horsepower Skyline GT-Rs in the world. After hosing away money on shoddy, slapped together rebuilds in the past, this time (just like the rest of the R34) nothing original is being reused. And yes, I probably should've done this after the first engine failure... but at that time Skylines were still £20,000.

Right, new engine spec. Deep breath, because this one's getting nerdy. It's a brand new RB26 block with Nitto wide journal 2.8-litre stroker kit, PRP block brace, ARP studs, ACL bearings, Hi Octane sump and an ATI 1,000bhp crank damper. There's a Tomei head gasket, all new seals, new water pump, belts and Barns single stage external oil pump. There's also a new cylinder head with Supertech valve springs and Tomei cams, PRP cam gears, PRP trigger kit, CAS bracket and LS1 alternator kit. All fasteners and flanges are zinc coated or powder coated too. That's a brief spec, and also excludes the machining, balancing of the rotating assembly, settling clearance, modified oil squirters and many, many hours of labour. This is also just the engine block – turbo, intake, fuelling and everything else is still to come.

I'd imagine you'll be wincing at the cost while nodding in approval. I'm assured this engine will run happily at the 800bhp mark without shooting valves into the atmosphere, however there is also the option of mapping it on spicy E85 fuel to crack the magic 1,000bhp mark. Utterly pointless given it's a road car that will be plenty fast enough on V Power. But clearly that's exactly what I'm going to do. Best start saving for engine number six.

Renowned photographer Mark has been working with* TopGear *for many, many years. When not taking photos he's buying inappropriate cars. Here he shares his addiction with the world

GO TO
FOR EXTENDED *TG* GARAGE REPORTS, AND TO EXPLORE THE ARCHIVE

GOODBYE

INEOS GRENADIER

£76,140 OTR/£79,481 as tested/£1,141 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: Does a utilitarian off-roader work as a lifestyle vehicle?

DRIVER: *OLLIE MARRIAGE*

EVERYONE HATES ON THE Grenadier. Too old fashioned, too slow, too inefficient, too idiosyncratic, not fit for modern life. None of that is wrong. It's a dreadful SUV. It is to the school run what a battle axe is to slicing veg – unwieldy, inappropriate and enough sharp edges to make you put an arm round your children and retreat to safety.

The issue is perspective. An SUV is an off roader that sprouted manners and forgot its origin story. The Grenadier is an off roader. Full stop. Maybe you think a car like that has no role to play in the 21st century – as far as UK road driving goes you've probably got a point. I've driven this car 10,000 miles in six months and I can't think of many new cars worse at doing distance and negotiating roundabouts.

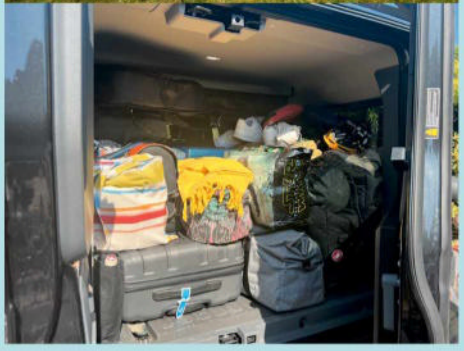
But equally I can't think of *any* that are better suited to scruffing down green lanes, scrubbing around the back of beyond, having stuff hung off them and generally being as useful as a tool belt. None. Not even the new Toyota Land Cruiser and certainly not the Defender. The criticism here is that Ineos has built the ultimate farm truck and then priced it beyond farm budgets.

My use existed somewhere between school runs and farms. Lifestyle off roading, that's me. Carrying bikes, towing trailers, going camping. The rest of the time it was regular daily use. For 90 per cent of the stuff I don't doubt a Land Cruiser or Defender would have done it better.

Two thousand miles around France five-up (see report three) was a challenge. It wasn't comfy for those in the back, the hi-fi was weedy, the aircon rubbish, and it averaged 19.4mpg. But we still talk about it because the travel became an adventure, the faults gave the car character and the occupants something to bond over. It was a metaphor for the whole trip on the run back to Calais when the windscreen wiper gave up and started flopping off the side of the screen.

That was the only thing that went wrong, easily solved with a spanner. Other issues? The door buttons are renowned for sticking in, but that only afflicted mine right at the end, and was easily cured with a quick wiggle or a thump next to the handle. But no electrical gremlins and no reason to visit a dealer. This is a solidly built rugged truck. I've said before that Ineos needs now what it can't earn for years, which is a reputation for durability. Nothing I've experienced gives me a reason to doubt that will come.

But there were irritations. I got used to the vague steering that needs constant correction, but not to the hopeless turning



Grenadier's interior is as utilitarian as they come. A good thing

circle, the way the steering weighted up so much swinging between locks. Same for the delayed step off when pulling away. Keep it away from urban use, because its clumsiness is deeply frustrating. The brakes are mushy, stopping distances long, rear visibility blocked by the split tailgate and 'performance' as you'd expect from a 2.7-tonne car.

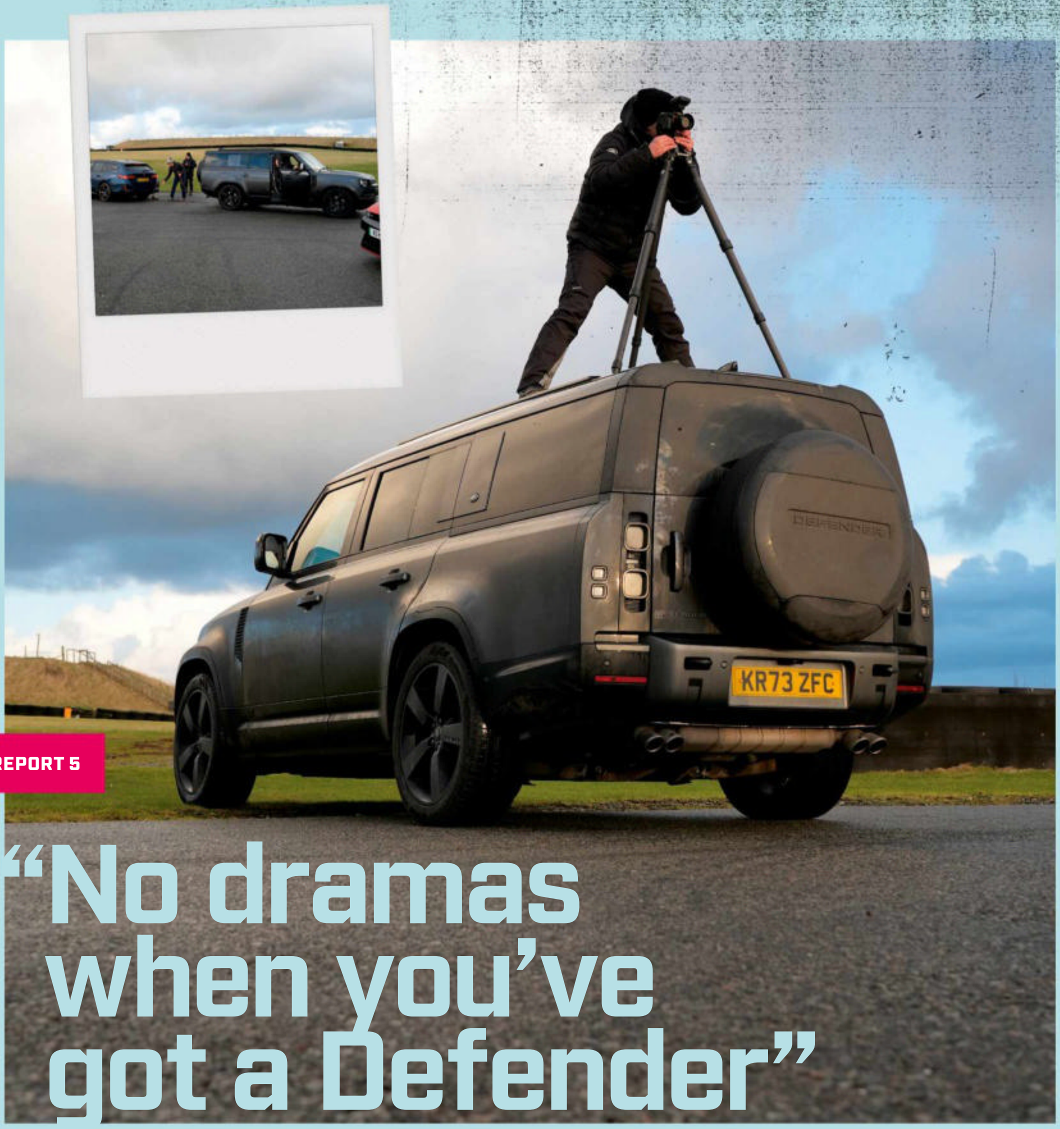
Quite a few low mileage cars have trickled onto the used market, maybe bought with greater expectation of daily refinement, but the point is that residual values are horrible. Not quite Merc EQE levels of depreciation, but drops of £30k after a year and 10,000 miles aren't pretty. Secondhand they look a good bet. And I tell you what, I'd far sooner spend £45k on a year old Grenadier than an overpriced decade old Defender.

When people tell me it's daft or pointless, what they're saying is that it doesn't conform to their expectations. But what defines whether a car is good or not is its fitness to your purpose, not theirs. It has a very particular – and admittedly rather out of step – skill set. As I look out at my Grenadierless driveway now, it feels a lot less ready for adventure.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 2993cc TT 6cyl diesel, 4WD
PERFORMANCE: 245bhp, 405lb ft, 0–62mph in 9.9secs, 99mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,740kg
ECONOMY: 25.2mpg, 291g/km

MILES SO FAR 10,535 **OUR MPG** 23.3



REPORT 5

"No dramas when you've got a Defender"

LAND ROVER DEFENDER 130

£115,435 OTR/£117,375 as tested/£1,784 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:

Is the biggest Defender the best?

DRIVER: JACK RIX

THE DEFENDER 130 HAS BECOME my Swiss army knife. I never want to separated, to be caught short without several thousand litres of bootspace, space for eight or the ability to ride wherever the road doesn't take us.

Take our recent hot hatch test on Anglesey. I cruised up from Sussex, where the average consumption tickled over 20mpg, and arrived prepared for the Defender to be totally ignored while I swapped tank handling for hot hatch agility. Wasn't long before it was called into action.

Rowan Horncastle had inched our BMW i5 Touring onto the grass metres from the tarmac... and promptly got buried in the mud. A hastily procured trailer strap and a wildly over engined SUV later and the BMW was back on solid ground. No dramas when you've got a Defender.

Cut to a few hours later and Mark Fagelson is getting ready to shoot the cover image. Thing is, to get 10 hot hatches all visible in frame, you need elevation. Nowhere higher than the Defender's roof, so up he goes with his tripod. At this point I'm practically bursting with pride.

Problem is, I'm a bit worried it has spoiled me forever, because how could whatever comes next possibly measure up?

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 5000cc supercharged V8, AWD

PERFORMANCE: 493bhp, 450lb ft, 0–62mph in 5.4secs, 149mph

KERBWEIGHT: 2,670kg

ECONOMY: 19.6mpg, 325g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 4,210 **OUR MPG** 20.1

REPORT 3

PEUGEOT 3008

£38,535/£39,135/£360

WHY IT'S HERE:

Is the striking looking Peugeot 3008 a style-over-substance crossover?

DRIVER: ESTHER NEVE

LAST REPORT I SAID I'D BE GOING on a roadtrip. I lied. I have, in fact, been on roadtrips plural. Just to really make sure I get the measure of how the new 3008 behaves on an extended journey. And, to make the experience as comprehensive as possible, I made sure the trips were not just on motorways, but A-roads and B-roads, and tiny country lanes.

What did we learn? Well, the new 3008 was a breeze in which to spend hours (and hours). The seats are comfortable and supportive for both driver and passengers; road, engine and tyre noise are not remotely intrusive; and the performance was plenty even for repetitive long and energy draining motorway hills.

What is a delight to report back is that after each journey I felt just as lively as when I'd started. There was no mental fatigue, even after hours sitting on the M25. All good.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1199cc 3cyl, FWD

PERFORMANCE: 138bhp, 170lb ft, 0–62mph in 10.2secs, 125mph

KERBWEIGHT: 1,573kg

ECONOMY: 44.6mpg, 124g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 3,900 **OUR MPG** 47.6

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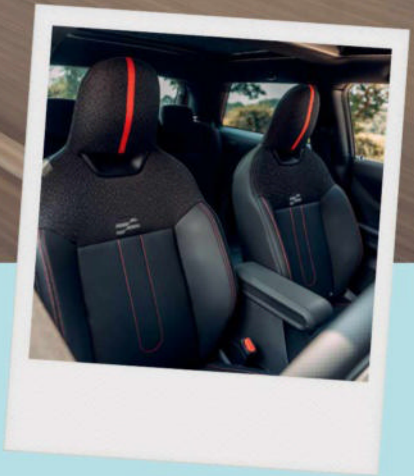
GOODBYE

"Is it good when a hot hatch's best point is low running costs?"



MINI COOPER S

£26,700 OTR/£34,700 as tested/£376 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:

This might be the last stand of the small petrol hot hatch

DRIVER: OLLIE KEW

EVERY TIME I COME TO THE END OF a long termer's run, there's two things I like to do with the final report. First, reflect on the actual car itself. What went wrong, what broke, what it cost, what it's worth now. Because these cars are here to show what they're like to *live* with.

Lots of good news, the Mini has been pretty painless. Let's rattle off the report card: no warning lights, no faults, no touchscreen meltdowns. The only tech foible has been an occasional falling out with my phone. No build quality foibles either. The Cooper S is stupidly stiff, but the trim doesn't buzz, the seats don't squeak and the carpets aren't bobbling. After 8,000 miles together, it's wearing fine.

The only unexpected cost was £130 for a new Pirelli, to replace one sacrificed on the lunar altar of Britain's pothole riddled roads.

Running costs were better than expected. Thanks to a very tall seventh gear and strong torque, the Mini routinely racked up 45mpg averages across a 400 mile tank – 400 miles on a £55 fill up... that's less than 14p per mile. I imagine the Cooper EV would work out cheaper still with strategic charging, but what price do you put on convenience and versatility?

Being a new and not especially common car, depreciation is tricky to pin down but I did find a 9,700 mile Mini Cooper S with a similar (huge) level of extras for sale at £28,500. *TopGear*'s car has an as tested price the wrong side of £37,000 (a Cooper S Sport starts at £31,170). This goes to show that a huge options spend when new rarely translates into strong residuals. Another reason to take it easy on the goodies.

Or ditch the S and buy a regular £23,000 Cooper. The tri-cyl engine sounds sweeter, is lighter and the car thanks you for it with massively more chuckable handling. For me, that's (still) the sweet spot.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1998cc turbo 4cyl, FWD

PERFORMANCE: 198bhp, 221lb ft, 0–62mph in 6.6secs, 150mph

KERBWEIGHT: 1,360kg

ECONOMY: 44.1mpg, 144g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 9,468 **OUR MPG** 39.8

LOVED AND LOST

CARS WE ONCE OWNED THAT STOLE OUR HEARTS FOREVER

TOYOTA YARIS SPORT

WRITTEN BY: GREG POTTS

Ah, the Yaris T-Sport. I only really loved what you could have been. In reality, you were a bit of a shitter.

From a distance you looked great, especially once I'd removed the aftermarket window tints. You were a bargain, left-field hot hatch and I hoped to restore some of your former glory while learning a little along the way.

Your red paint was slightly faded and flakey, but underneath all the important bits had both the look and the structural integrity of bran flakes. I should have realised that you were a lost cause when the exhaust split in two after taking a particularly hefty speed bump, but at least that allowed the little 1.5-litre VVT-i engine to drown out the din being made by the knackered wheel bearings.

It's probably best that we parted when we did. I hope your new owner enjoyed the bingo wing-busting effect of the steering wheel vibrations at motorway speeds. I probably should have given them those Pagid brake discs that I never got round to installing, although I hear they'll also fit a third-gen MR2...

Yours,

GP

WHAT ELSE WE'RE RUNNING

REPORT 6

AUDI RS7

You may have seen the RS6 GT – Audi's last of the line, IMSA GTO inspired mega wagon. All 60 UK cars are sold, along with 600 worldwide, despite a £200k price. So why no RS7 GT? Good question. It's just some bodywork and stickers. Audi, you should have built it. You haven't, so I got @j.b.cars to do it instead. Cool, eh? RH

REPORT 4

CUPRA BORN VZ

Spent some time in the facelifted Leon. The 300 is essentially a Golf GTI Clubsport in a Spanish suit, but it's an excellent hot hatch. Somehow just over £50k as tested (when did hot hatches get so out of touch?), but possibly worth the extra £4k vs our Born for the crazy FWD vibe. The Born is brilliant but missing the fizz. GP

REPORT 3

CITROEN e-SPACETOURER

The e-SpaceTourer and I embarked on a romantic off grid retreat to a cabin in the Herefordshire woods. It feels fitting – and genuinely pleasurable – to arrive in the deepest countryside under silent, emissions free electric motivation. Only problem is, no mains power means no way of recharging the big lad... SP

PROJECT CORNER

Time to stretch the E30's legs and investigate the mystery box in the boot

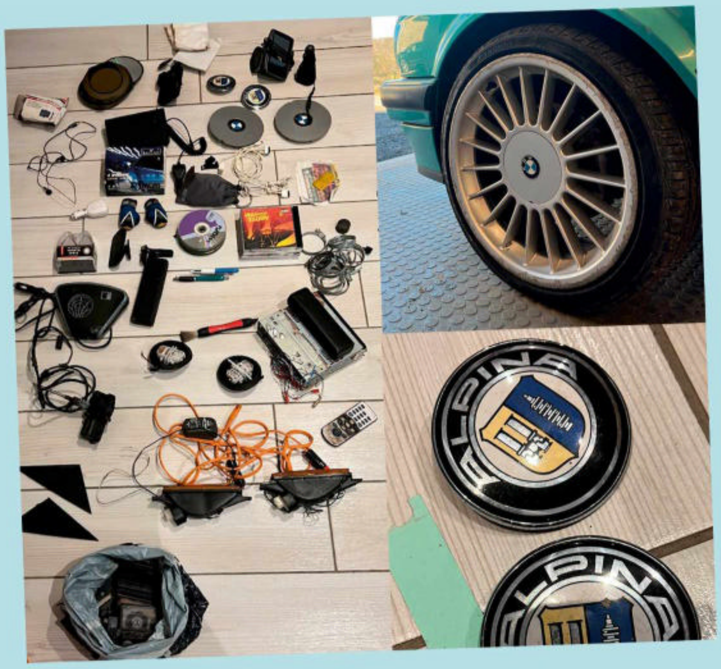
THE POTTS REPORT 3

WHAT IS IT? 1991 BMW E30 Design Edition in neon green 1/50
WRITER: *Katie Potts*

TIME TO TAKE THE BMW 300 miles north to my hometown to begin stripping and fixing it up. A chance to see how healthy the engine is. The best part? The seat base has given way so it's going to be a bumpy ride up the M6. Five hours later we touch down in Cumbria (only a bit damp from the leaking roof), but the car doesn't skip a beat, lined with premium fuel. The tank was £85, didn't need refuelling en route and performed well with no misfires. It was also a chance to put my foot down for the first time out of London's 20mph everywhere speed limit.

Parked in the dry garage, the first task was exploring the mystery box of bits in the boot. I felt like I opened a 1990s time capsule – the previous owner kept various tapes, car parts (an original headlight washer!), radios, phone adapters, and so many memories.

I found Alpina badges and parts. It appeared the previous owner was a fan and was intending to build a quasi Alpina as the wheels on it were replica multispokes. This is controversial, and not quite my cup of tea, so first thing on the shopping list looks to be a set of new wheels for the BMW.



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ALPINE A290
TOYOTA GR YARIS
HYUNDAI IONIQ 5 N
FORD FOCUS ST
CUPRA BORN VZ
MINI COOPER S
AUDI S3
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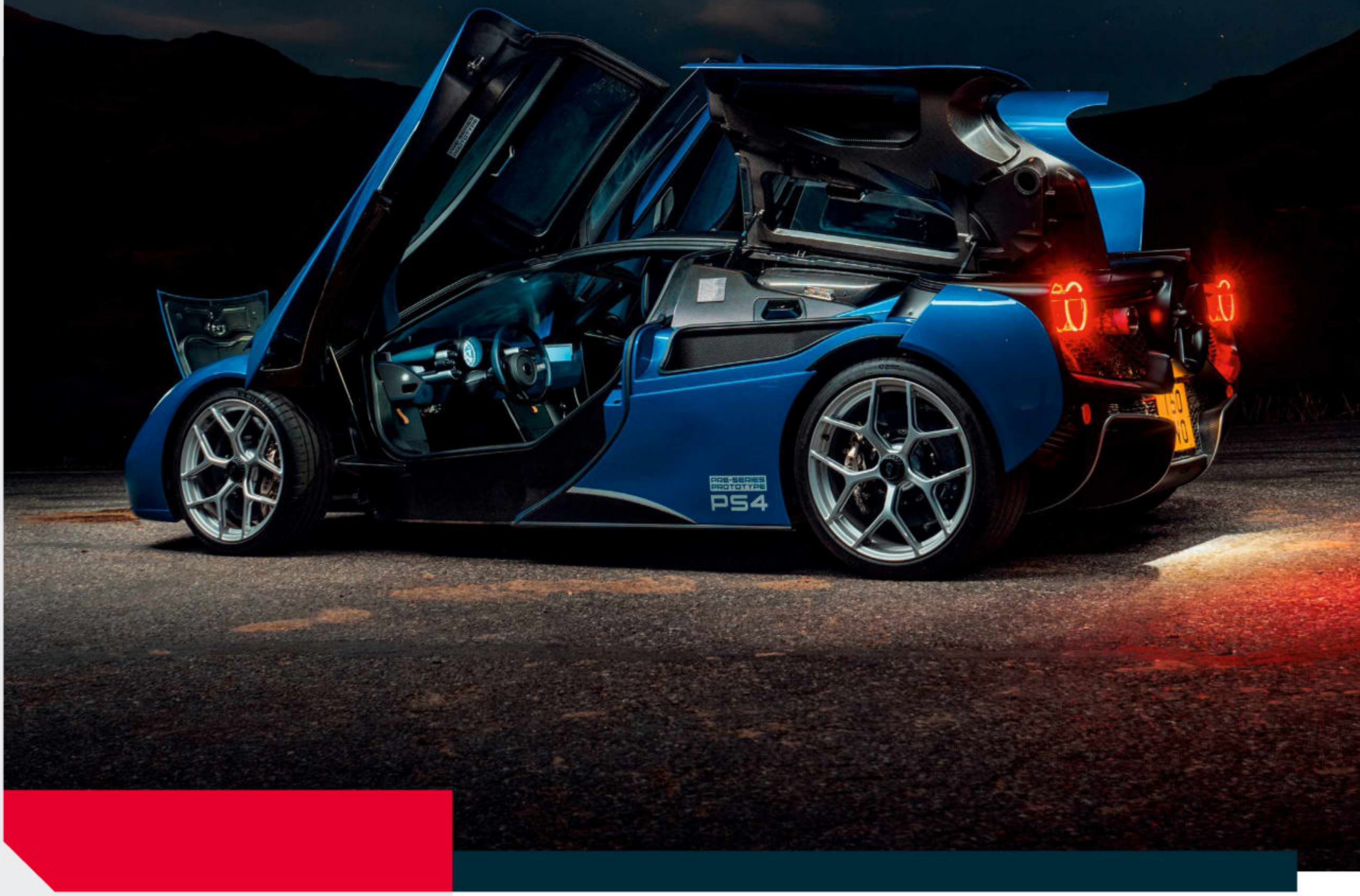

PRE-SERIES PROTOTYPE
PS4

CITY CARS

TG TIP
The £18k 3 trim has best blend of price and tech with heated seats and wireless phone charging

1

KIA PICANTO

PRICE: £15,845–£18,745

Fizzy, frugal and fun to drive, the tiny Picanto has been refined over three generations since 2003. The latest model got a welcome style injection when it was facelifted in 2023. There are surprisingly generous kit levels on offer, too

Aimed at: canny pensioners, new drivers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

HYUNDAI i10

PRICE: £16,380–£18,980

This tiny hatchback feels very grown up from behind the wheel, and the i10 is an eminently sensible city car choice with a strong spec. Great on holiday, too

Aimed at: car rental agencies

3

FIAT 500e

PRICE: £24,995–£33,995

One of the original retro tribute acts has matured into an EV while holding to its roots. Back's cramped, but there's still room for soft toys on the parcel shelf

Aimed at: retro hungry millennials

4

TOYOTA AYGO X

PRICE: £16,515–£20,540

What do you get if you cross a city car and an SUV? The Aygo X, apparently – much cooler than the old Aygo, but that X is only worth 11mm of ride height

Aimed at: the kids

5

CITROEN AMI

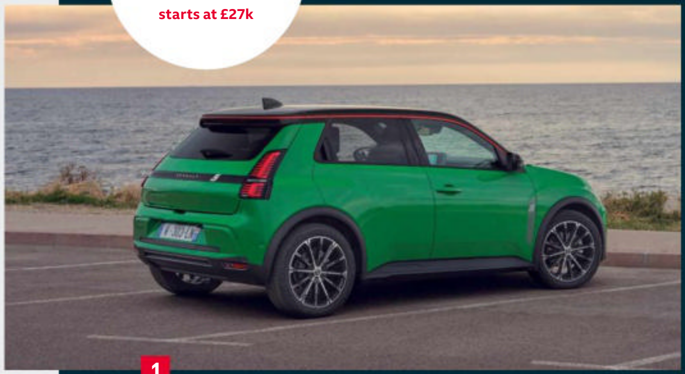
PRICE: £7,695–£8,095

Unlike the other cars here, the Ami really is just for the city, with a range of up to 46 miles and a top speed of 30mph. Still, quicker than getting the bus

Aimed at: antisocial commuters

SUPERMINIS

TG TIP
Techno trim with the 52kWh battery is the best all rounder and starts at £27k



1

RENAULT 5

PRICE: £22,995–£28,995

There's a delicate line to tread with a retro modern take on a stone cold classic, but Renault has managed it well with its new 5. Nods to the past abound, but that doesn't stop the supermini from being a great all round small electric car

Aimed at: retrospectives

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

SUZUKI SWIFT

PRICE: £19,199–£21,549

Latest version of the Swift shows that cheap can still leave you feeling cheerful, especially with low monthly costs and the right kit levels

Aimed at: bargain hunters

3

RENAULT CLIO

PRICE: £18,595–£24,895

The hybrid version works out a bit expensive, but the Clio is as solid a buy as it ever was – a proven package with a bit of added French flair

Aimed at: Nicole, papa, *toute la famille*

4

MINI COOPER

PRICE: £23,270–£39,120

New Mini takes the car on in all the right ways, with a sharp exterior design and tech-focused interior that's fun but still useful. Ride's a bit firm, though

Aimed at: young professionals/estate agents

5

SKODA FABIA

PRICE: £20,295–£26,195

No electric whizzery here, just a great all-rounder with a solid 1.0-litre 3cyl petrol engine and some nifty interior touches (like the door umbrella)

Aimed at: sensible folks

FAMILY HATCHBACKS

TG TIP
Hybrid only, and stick to entry level **Elegance** trim for decent kit and best economy

1

HONDA CIVIC

PRICE: £35,005–£39,805

The strange thing about the Honda Civic is how wildly it veers from one generation to the next – you get a crazy one, then a sensible one, a crazy one... This current version is the sensible one, but that's not a bad thing – it might be conservative on the outside, but the interior is simply put together and to a high standard. You won't mind long family journeys, and you know that it'll all last for miles and miles. There's a strangely complex hybrid setup under the bonnet, but you needn't worry about all that, because the upshot is that the car drives and handles well enough, but won't cost you the earth in petrol bills. See, sometimes it does pay to be a little sensible. Though if you do want the Civic to be a bit crazy you can always go for the Type R version, which delivers in spades

Aimed at: spreadsheet users

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

SKODA OCTAVIA

PRICE: £27,390–£40,390

There must be a few noses out of joint in the darkest corporate depths of the VW Group – of the host of cars based on the MkVIII Golf, the Skoda's the best

Aimed at: people with sensible shoes

3

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF

PRICE: £27,760–£45,785

Long the benchmark in this sector, the crown has slipped a little in this eighth generation guise. We wouldn't count the Golf out for long though

Aimed at: everyone

4

MG4

PRICE: £26,995–£36,495

Popped up out of nowhere to become one of the easiest to recommend electric family hatchbacks around. Even looks good in orange

Aimed at: early adopters/taxi drivers

5

RENAULT MEGANE E-TECH

PRICE: £33,995–£37,995

The strange thing about the latest Megane is that it doesn't excel anywhere, but overall adds up to a great family car that happens to be electric too

Aimed at: stylish school runs

BEST B-ROAD DRIVE

MAZDA MX-5

PRICE: from £28,015

There's something a bit cheese on toast about the Mazda MX-5 – well sure there are more exciting options available out there, but sometimes a little Japanese cnovertible with sharp handling and a sense of fun is just what you need on a pleasant Sunday afternoon

Aimed at: woolly hats

HOT HATCHES

TG TIP
Don't be tempted by the £3.8k **Carbon Pack**, it's expensive enough as it is...

1

HONDA CIVIC TYPE R

PRICE: £50,050

Forget the slightly traditional setup of our 2022 Car of the Year, Honda's Type R follows the original hot hatch template fairly slavishly but it has kept it feeling brilliantly fresh. The electric ones have a lot of work to do if they want to compete

Aimed at: purists

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

TOYOTA GR YARIS

PRICE: £44,250-£60,000

The best Toyota ever? It really could be. This first version was a hoot to drive – fun at all speeds in all weathers. Updated one gets more bhp and an auto

Aimed at: cognoscenti

3

FORD FOCUS ST

PRICE: £37,705-£42,905

Practically Jurassic these days, but with a top notch drive this old stager can still show the youngsters where to go, particularly in ST Edition spec

Aimed at: budget purists

4

AUDI S3

PRICE: £47,550-£53,025

The S3 got much better when Audi chucked in the RS3's trick rear diff at the last facelift – this mature all-rounder parties hard but likes a bit of hummus

Aimed at: single car households

5

HYUNDAI IONIQ 5 N

PRICE: £65,000

The hot hatch for the computer games generations is rammed full of gimmicks, but is still able to back it up where it really counts – on the road

Aimed at: gamers

CROSSOVERS

TG TIP
Entry level **Air** trim comes pretty well equipped – just go for the bigger battery

1

KIA EV3

PRICE: £32,995-£43,895

The Kianaissance continues apace, with an intriguing small electric effort that's finally delivering some of what we want from EVs. It's stylish, full of interesting details, about as fuss free as electric motoring gets and efficient too

Aimed at: punctual adopters

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

DACIA DUSTER

PRICE: £18,850-£26,850

If you're going to go back to basics then you really need to nail those essentials, which the Duster has managed effortlessly into its second generation

Aimed at: bargain hunters

3

VOLVO EX30

PRICE: £32,850-£44,850

The EX30 is full of Scandi cool and delightfully simple to live with. Space is admittedly tight in the back, but the interior quality makes up for it

Aimed at: stylish families

4

FORD PUMA

PRICE: £26,350-£33,600

The UK's official bestseller has taken on the torch of the Fiesta as a decent little car with solid appeal across the board. Just don't mention the old one

Aimed at: everyone

5

HYUNDAI KONA

PRICE: £26,040-£33,165

Korean carmaker's bold design streak continues with the latest Kona, which remains a solid family car. EV's a great first toe in the electric waters

Aimed at: number crunchers

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LUXURY SUVs

TG TIP
P510e hybrid is the way to go – in **Vogue SE** trim it's all the Range Rover you'll ever need

1

RANGE ROVER

PRICE: £104,025–£192,000

Arguably the original lifestyle SUV, the Range Rover has evolved massively since the 1970 original, developing into a luxury beast. The latest one hasn't just nailed the brief, it has set the benchmark for everyone else to follow

Aimed at: cash buyers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

VOLVO EX90

PRICE: £96,255–£99,950

The old XC90 was starting to get left behind, but the new EX90 has wrestled its way to the front of the post SUV queue while remaining as charming as ever

Aimed at: polo necks

3

FERRARI PUROSANGUE

PRICE: £313,360

Ferrari says this definitely isn't an SUV, but ironically with its sporty credentials it's probably the most SUV out of all the SUVs that have ever been made

Aimed at: posers

4

ROLLS-ROYCE CULLINAN

PRICE: £298,800–£342,600

Even Rolls-Royce had to follow the money and make an SUV. Fortunately you can't see what it looks like from the back seat – that's the place to enjoy it

Aimed at: old money

5

BMW iX

PRICE: £70,985–£124,605

This tech-laden electric SUV takes a different approach to luxury – it's still comfortable, but it dazzles with interesting materials and nice touches

Aimed at: tech VPs

OFF ROADERS

TG TIP
Just two trims here – pricier **First Edition** is the only way to get round headlights

1

LAND CRUISER

PRICE: £74,995–£79,995

The Toyota was always peerless off road, but it had everything except kerbside appeal – until this stylish retro version arrived. It might be criminal to watch a pedigree rockhopper waste away on the school run, but it gets slippery in Richmond sometimes

Aimed at: peacekeepers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

LAND ROVER DEFENDER

PRICE: £58,310–£160,800

Everyone had an opinion about the classic Defender, but no one was buying. Now it's selling at 10x the rate and the full fat OCTA takes it further than ever

Aimed at: school run mums

3

MERCEDES-BENZ G-CLASS

PRICE: £136,690–£203,595

The looks of the G-Wagen are the same as they've ever been, but that masks the progress that's been made under the skin. The new electric one is fun

Aimed at: original gangsters

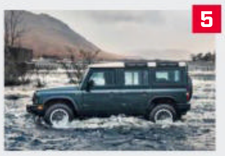
4

FORD RANGER

PRICE: £35,130–£62,557

Like a good pair of jeans, the Ranger is able to switch seamlessly from work to play, no wonder it's a trades favourite. A little bit large for parts of the UK though

Aimed at: sole traders



5

INEOS GRENADIER

PRICE: £65,015–£79,140

A passion project from a rich old billionaire who wanted a modernised version of his compromised old 4x4. Fair enough, seems to have managed it

Aimed at: old rich men

SPORTS CARS

TG TIP
Into driving? Carrera T. For everyday use, it's the base Carrera with Heritage Design interior

1

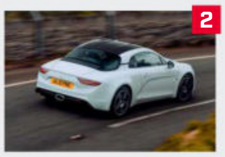
PORSCHE 911

PRICE: £99,800–£139,100

The definitive sports car, despite its inherent layout flaws, because it's been ruthlessly honed millimetre by millimetre over the past 70 years by people who really know what they're doing. Newly facelifted 992.2 version even has a hybrid option

Aimed at: heavyweights

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

ALPINE A110

PRICE: £54,490–£91,940

This stripped down French number has managed to take up the baton for feathery, beautifully handling sports cars since Lotus gave up trying

Aimed at: lightweights

3

TOYOTA GR86

PRICE: £32,495

The back to basics sports car is destined to be a future classic, and it's one of the best cars that Toyota's made (but it's no GR Yaris)

Aimed at: purists

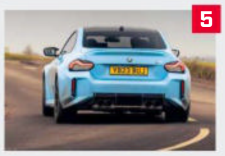
4

PORSCHE 718 CAYMAN GTS

PRICE: £75,300

Sure, it's getting old, but the Cayman is one of those compelling driver's cars that we need to celebrate while they're still allowed to be on sale

Aimed at: B-road blasters



5

BMW M2

PRICE: £67,055

The latest version of the BMW M2 is more grown up than it used to be, but doesn't that apply to us all? It's a great daily driver that grows on you over time

Aimed at: wealthier purists

SUPERCARS

TG TIP
Don't have the £6,250 super lightweight carbon seats. Regular buckets are much better

1

McLAREN 750S

PRICE: £244,760

Launched in 2023 as a successor to the 720S, McLaren really stepped it up with this car – it's better to drive than its predecessor, but crucially it's also better to sit in and easier to operate. It even comes with Apple CarPlay...

Aimed at: rich Shanghai drivers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

FERRARI 296 GTB

PRICE: £241,550

People got nervous when they heard this Ferrari supercar would be a V6 hybrid... they needn't have worried, it all serves to make it a better drive

Aimed at: self-made business people

3

LAMBORGHINI REVUELTO

PRICE: £446,742

There's hybrid tech in there, but there's also a socking V12 in what could very well be the best Lamborghini since the iconic 1960s Miura

Aimed at: high rollers

4

PORSCHE 911 GT3 RS

PRICE: £192,600

You've got to be a good driver to get the most out of the GT3 RS's repertoire, but Porsche has thrown everything it has at this racer for the road

Aimed at: amateur racers

5

McLAREN ARTURA

PRICE: £189,200

The conservative exterior serves to hide some big developments under the skin – ssh, but the Artura might even be a better daily driver than the 296 GTB

Aimed at: brave buyers

HYPERCARS

TG TIP
It'd be sacrilegious to change anything on Gordon's car, but he'll paint it how you like

1 GMA T.50

PRICE: £2.8 MILLION

Gordon Murray had already done it all with the McLaren F1 back in the 1990s, but you always sensed he had a bit more to prove. And here's the result, the car that shows lightning doesn't just strike twice, it'll do it exactly where Gordon tells it to. "The last great analogue supercar" was what Gordon Murray promised – and he's delivered it with relentless attention to detail and a dedication to the end prize. With the electric era almost upon us, we'll probably never see the likes of this pure, undiluted V12-powered monster ever again. It's not just the sum of Murray's knowhow and experience distilled into a ruthless hypercar, you can get something out of it without being an F1 driver, it's an enjoyable drive for whoever happens to be behind the wheel. Your move, everyone else

Aimed at: loaded enthusiasts

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2 PAGANI UTOPIA

PRICE: £2.2 MILLION

In a truly utopian society we'd all be driving one of these. It's not bad for a third car – easy to forget that Pagani's been very discerning about its model lineup

Aimed at: tech billionaires

3 ASTON MARTIN VALKYRIE

PRICE: £3 MILLION

The 'F1 car for the road' line has become a bit of a cliche, but the Valkyrie is certainly visceral and noisy enough to be considered that way

Aimed at: rich collectors

4 KOENIGSEGG JESKO

PRICE: £2.9 MILLION

Well it's named after the boss's dad, so it had to be a good car – and it is. Certainly worthy of a pat on the head, well done son

Aimed at: Monaco residents

5 BUGATTI CHIRON

PRICE: £3.2 MILLION

If the Veyron was the Volkswagen Group's moonshot, the Chiron reaches for the stars at warp speed. How do you follow this?

Aimed at: old money

BIGGEST SCREEN

BMW i7

PRICE: from £101,765

There are people who like to be chauffeured because they're busy and important, and there are people who like to be chauffeured so that they can watch more films. Probably. All of them would be happy in the back of the i7 electric limo watching the 31.3in 'theatre screen'

Aimed at: cinephiles

BIG FAMILY CARS

TG TIP
It only costs £500 extra to go for the 7-seat over the 5-seat model – a no brainer

1

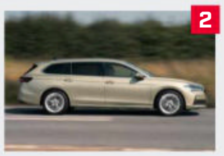
VW ID.BUZZ 7-SEAT

PRICE: £59,545–£67,945

The ID.Buzz is not merely another retro face (that's the sugar on the electric pill), in many ways it's an innovative bit of family transport, especially in its seven-seater guise that finally releases the practicality the car needed

Aimed at: lifestyle families

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

SKODA SUPERB ESTATE

PRICE: £36,995–£48,735

This car has always had to be good with a name like that, but it's hard to think of any other family estate out there that does a better job for the money

Aimed at: posh families

3

BMW i5 TOURING

PRICE: £69,945–£99,995

You wait ages for an electric family estate and then a brilliant one comes along all at once. Shows off all of BMW's electric knowhow and body control wizardry

Aimed at: the outside lane

4

HYUNDAI SANTA FE

PRICE: £46,775–£57,635

Stylish, well built, comfortable and quiet – not to mention loads of room inside for carrying people and stuff. Hyundai's hot streak continues

Aimed at: sensible families

5

DACIA JOGGER

PRICE: £18,400–£24,100

The Jogger is a masterpiece of cutting out the unnecessary (weight *and* money) while maintaining the fundamentals of a useful family estate

Aimed at: clever families

GRAND TOURERS

TG TIP
Got a dog? Aston's got you – the **Pet Pack** throws in a bed and a portable washer

1

ASTON VANQUISH

PRICE: FROM £330,000

The Vanquish has been reborn – sounds a little grand, but the latest version has brought the car right up to date for its third incarnation. It mixes an exciting drive with genuine grand touring ability in a way that must have all its rivals quaking

Aimed at: secret agents

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

FERRARI 12CILINDRI

PRICE: £336,500

Ferrari has softened the edges off the 12Cilindri's forebears to create a car that's probably the most capable all-rounder to have come out of Maranello

Aimed at: watch collectors

3

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT

PRICE: £152,820–£257,700

If you had to drive really far there's probably no car you'd rather be in than the Continental GT. Except maybe a chauffeur driven Phantom of course

Aimed at: pipe smokers

4

PORSCHE 911 TURBO

PRICE: £200,600

The 911 range is like one of those Italian gelaterias with hundreds of flavours – seems excessive, but we love them all. Turbo might be the pick of the bunch

Aimed at: daily drivers

5

MASERATI GRANTURISMO

PRICE: £133,120–£179,950

A GT by name and a true GT by nature – this latest GranTurismo has avoided the temptation to go a little *too* sporty and nails the brief. EV's good too

Aimed at: tassled loafers

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BBC TG LIFE SKILLS

HOW TO...

Wash your car

There are some people who love washing their cars, and by the looks of the traffic you see on the road equal amounts of people who enjoy getting their cars dirty so that people know how many puddles they drive through. In between are the sensible people who don't really care either way and stop at a petrol station car wash before popping over to visit their parents.

It's a bit of a fuss, cleaning your car, and everyone seems to have a different idea about how it should be done. Two buckets, three buckets, hose, pressure washer, washing up liquid, expensive car shampoo (and cars don't even have hair! Occasionally eyelashes, perhaps. Those can be gently moistened with baby shampoo), chamois, microfibre, old pants. Although don't take any advice from the likes of us, incidentally. Anyone who actually cares about these things would be devastated to turn up at a car magazine shoot (no particular outlet in mind, obviously) and spot journalists giving the latest metal a gritty rubdown with a spray bottle of window cleaner and a fistful of kitchen roll.

Searching for advice is every bit as confusing. Every website going has a detailed guide on getting your motor clean – even those adventure loving adrenaline junkies at Red Bull have squeaked into the top six pages of search results with their welcome thoughts on washing and waxing. Strangely, there's nothing on that particular page about using any of the company's energy drink products on your car, though we suspect they might be useful for cleaning the alloys of stubborn brake dust (and some people do actually swear by the stuff for kitchen floors).

As far as we can work out there are five main steps to automotive ablutions – firstly you need to give the thing a good rinse to remove the largest bits of detritus like bird poo, chunks of dirt or aftermarket spoilers. Secondly, starting from the top of the car, use water and soap to clean downwards (so that dirty water doesn't run over the already clean bits). Third is a thorough rinse to get all that soapy water off the car, then fourthly attack the windows. A solution of vinegar and water is ideal to maintain a streak free finish, then dry off the glass with a clean cloth. That leaves task number five, which is to pay the kid next door whatever you've negotiated for the job. Around £2.50 seems fair, they need to learn about the exploitative nature of capitalism.

> **"Everyone has a different idea about how it should be done"**

WORDS: SAM BURNETT PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY

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